



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



THURSDAY — 12 MAY 2022

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Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	05/12 Russia gains ground eastern Ukraine
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SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2022/05/12/ukraine-russia-war-kharkiv-donbas/1211652352540/
GIST	<p>May 12 (UPI) -- Russian forces assaulted a number of targets in eastern Ukraine on Thursday, including the last bastion of resistance at a steel plant in the port city of Mariupol, Ukrainian officials said as the war approaches the start of its fourth month.</p> <p>Russian troops have stepped up attacks this week in Ukraine's east -- notably the mostly separatist Donbas -- and have continued to try and shell Ukrainian resistance into submission at the Mariupol plant.</p> <p>Ukrainian officials said Thursday that Moscow has had some success in these attacks.</p> <p>One Ukrainian military official told CNN that Russian forces "completely destroyed" captured settlements in Luhansk and said that Russian shelling intensified along the "entire Luhansk front."</p> <p>Serhiy Hayday, head of the Luhansk region military administration, said that there was heavy fighting Thursday around Severodonetsk and that the situation "has significantly deteriorated."</p> <p>Hayday also said, however, that Ukrainian units in Belohorivka are "holding back the Russian invasion."</p> <p>"Our defenders have twice destroyed pontoon crossings, and based on the actions of the Russians, the third time will be the same," he said according to CNN.</p> <p>Britain's Defense Ministry noted that some of the Russian fighting has stalled and Moscow has lost ground in parts of the Donbas and around Kharkiv in the northeast. On Wednesday, Ukrainian officials reported significant gains in the Kharkiv area, which has been under constant assault since the war began in February.</p> <p>Ukrainian forces recaptured several towns along the Russian border, Kyiv said, in what's been part of a Ukrainian counterattack that's shown to be effective against slower Moscow troops.</p> <p>"The withdrawal of Russian forces from Kharkiv is a tacit recognition of Russia's inability to capture key Ukrainian cities where they expected limited resistance from the population," the British Defense Ministry said in a tweet.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/12 US Marshals to protect Justices at home
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2022/05/12/DOJ-Supreme-Court-justices-protection-abortion/1491652334540/
GIST	<p>May 12 (UPI) -- Attorney General Merrick Garland has ordered the U.S. Marshals Service to protect the safety of Supreme Court justices as protesters have staged demonstrations outside some of their homes in response to a leaked high court draft opinion to overturn federal abortion protections.</p> <p>Justice Department spokesman Anthony Coley made the announcement in a statement Wednesday amid calls from some politicians for authorities to do more to protect Supreme Court justices and their families amid heightened political environment.</p> <p>"Attorney General Garland continues to be briefed on security related to the Supreme Court and Supreme Court justices," Coley said. "The Attorney General directed the U.S. Marshals Service to help ensure the justices' safety by providing additional support to the Marshal of the Supreme Court and Supreme Court Police."</p> <p>The announcement was made ahead of a planned protest by Ruth Sotomayor outside the Virginia and Maryland homes of six conservative Supreme Court Justices Brett Kavanaugh, Amy Coney Barrett, Samuel Alito, Clarence Thomas and John Roberts.</p>

Protests have been staged outside some of their houses since a high court draft opinion to strike down the landmark Roe vs. Wade ruling that protected a woman's ability to have an abortion was leaked to the press early this month, sparking anger among Democrats and women's rights advocates.

The protests have raised concern about the safety of those who sit on the high bench, with Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan and Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin calling on Garland in a letter Wednesday to do more to ensure the justices' protection, arguing that the protests were unlawful.

"It is in your hands to ensure that the applicable federal law is enforced to preserve the integrity of our American judicial system and the safety of our citizens," the governors wrote.

"While we are willing to assist in the event the need for increased security measures becomes imminent, federal law enforcement entities must take the lead and provide sustained resources to protect the justices and ensure these residential areas are secure in the weeks and months ahead."

Youngkin on Wednesday also sent a letter to Fairfax County Board of Supervisors Chairman Jeff McKay requesting that the county police department create an "expanded security perimeter" around the homes of three Supreme Court justices who live within its border.

McKay promptly rejected the request, saying in a letter of his own that the perimeter presented First Amendment "concerns."

Youngkin told McKay that the Virginia State Police have offered and remain ready to provide the county with law enforcement resources to ensure the perimeter, which would bar entrance to unauthorized vehicles and pedestrians, was established prior to the Wednesday protests.

"We believe for the safety of the justices and their families, their neighbors and the law enforcement heroes dedicated to preserving peace and order in our communities, that an expanded security perimeter should be established," Youngkin wrote, adding that he also believes "such demonstrations and picketing should not be allowed at the justices' homes as they are meant to intimidate and influence the justices, not to mention, scaring their families and small children."

McKay responded in his own letter by saying the Fairfax Police Department is dedicated to ensuring the safety of all and that its officers will enforce laws to protect persons and property.

He added on top of the First Amendment issues the perimeter would present, it would also essentially function as a checkpoint, which have been found to violated the Fourth Amendment.

"We are committed to working within the framework of the U.S. Constitution to ensure the safety of the justices, their families, affected neighborhoods and those gathered to express a variety of viewpoints," McKay said.

On Monday, lawmakers in the U.S. Senate passed bipartisan legislation to expand security protection to families of Supreme Court justices.

Meanwhile, Chief Justice John Roberts has directed the Marshal of the Court to launch an investigation to find the source behind the leaked draft opinion.

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HEADLINE	05/12 NKorea fires 3 ballistic missiles
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/nkorea-fires-ballistic-missile-off-its-east-coast-skorea-military-2022-05-12/
GIST	SEOUL, May 12 (Reuters) - North Korea fired three ballistic missiles toward the sea off its east coast on Thursday, South Korea said, in the latest such move by the isolated country racing to advance its weapons programmes on the day it first reported a COVID-19 outbreak.

Japan's coastguard confirmed the launch of a ballistic missile by North Korea, citing its military. The projectile appeared to fall outside Japan's exclusive economic zone, public broadcaster NHK said.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said three short-range ballistic missiles were fired from the Sunan area of the North's capital, Pyongyang, where an international airport is located and where the North had said it fired its largest intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), the Hwasong-17, on March 24.

The missiles flew approximately 360 kilometres (224 miles), reaching an altitude of 90 km and a maximum velocity of Mach 5, the Joint Chiefs of Staff said.

The firing was the first after the inauguration this week of conservative South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol, who has signalled a hard line against the North's weapons development.

The launch, the North's 16th known weapons test this year, also came hours after it reported its first COVID-19 outbreak, declaring a "gravest national emergency" and ordering a national lockdown.

Yoon's national security office issued a statement condemning the launch and saying it "deplored the duplicitous conduct" of firing ballistic missiles and ignoring the plight of its people in the middle of a COVID outbreak.

In its last weapons test on Saturday, the North used a submarine-launched ballistic missile, which it has been aggressively developing in recent years.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un vowed late last month to expedite the country's buildup of nuclear arsenal, amid stalled denuclearisation talks with the United States.

U.S. and South Korean officials have said Pyongyang's first nuclear test since 2017 could take place as early as this month.

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HEADLINE	05/11 Naval targets discovered in China desert?
SOURCE	https://news.usni.org/2022/05/11/great-wall-of-naval-targets-discovered-in-chinese-desert
GIST	<p>China has been honing its ship-killing skills for potential future conflicts on new targets in a remote desert, according to new satellite photos reviewed by USNI News. New analysis shows the People's Liberation Army is testing the ability to hit ships in port with long-range ballistic missiles.</p> <p>Since USNI News reported China has been building aircraft carrier targets in the Takmalakan Desert, other target sites have emerged forming a string of large-scale target ranges running along the eastern edge of the desert, according to new satellite photos. Several of these are naval and two have layouts that appear to be modeled on ships in port.</p> <p>Eight miles southwest of an elaborate aircraft carrier layout, a site with full-scale piers and a destroyer-sized ship-like target was constructed in December. A test missile hit a dead center on the ship replica in February and then the target was then quickly disassembled and is now gone, according to more recent images.</p> <p>This new target was discovered as part of the research into aircraft carrier targets, which had been found by All Source Analysis (ASA) with more details revealed by high-resolution satellite imagery from Maxar Technologies.</p> <p>Another similar naval base target was found about 190 miles southwest by Damien Symons, an independent defense analyst. This location was built in December 2018, but had escaped notice until now. The pier layout is similar to the destroyer-like site, and it also includes ship targets, with one in the same place as the latest target.</p>

The nature, location and strikes on these sites all suggest the targets are meant for testing ballistic missiles. These hypersonic anti-ship ballistic missiles (ASBMs) are an increasingly significant threat to warships.

China is known to have been developing several ASBMs. Two types, the DF-21D and DF-26 are land based. Another type, designation unknown, is [carried by the H-6 bomber](#). And there is now confirmation that the Type-055 Renhai Class cruiser [can launch a smaller one](#), provisionally identified as the YJ-21.

Damien Symon said that there are signs of sophisticated targeting.

“The layout of the targets is very calculated,” he said. “The orientations, shapes and sizes are consistent across multiple targets. There is nothing haphazard about these sites.”

The targets appear to be shaped by laying metal sheets on the ground. “This is a different material to the piers and buildings” Symon adds. “It may reflect heat or radar differently, this also might give us an indication of the complex systems and effort behind these experiments.”

The naval base target destroyed in February was similar to the one Symon found. It is almost a duplicate of the older target, he said

Modern ‘dumb’ ballistic missiles have small circles of error probability, a measure of the distance from the aiming point where there is still a 50 percent chance of it hitting. But if the aiming point is on the pier of a crowded port, most of the CEP is still water, and near-misses into a harbor are unlikely to have the desired effect.

The Chinese missiles may use infrared, optics or radar to form a picture of the target. They could then adjust their trajectory by tiny amounts to land exactly on the target. From open-source information one cannot conclude whether the missiles are using infrared or radar, but there are indications of both. Modern targeting sensors are typically connected to artificial intelligence, allowing the missile to discern targets and choose the intended or highest-value option.

ASBMs, if they are able to discern a ship from a pier, could inflict a killer opening blow against an enemy navy. The fear is fleets could be decapitated before they can escape to open water or disperse.

With at least four ASBM weapons in its inventor has caused concern in the Pentagon and were cited in the Department of Defense’s most recent [Chinese military power report](#).

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HEADLINE	05/12 Army to revamp Alaska forces: Arctic fight
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-alaska-weather-army-05c4bf5097a566a60b7f4c0ddb71150c
GIST	<p>JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska (AP) — The U.S. Army is poised to revamp its forces in Alaska to better prepare for future cold-weather conflicts, and it is expected to replace the larger, heavily equipped Stryker Brigade in the state with a more mobile infantry unit better suited for the frigid fight, Army leaders say.</p> <p>Army Secretary Christine Wormuth said she expects to make a final decision soon about the Alaska troop change, saying she will likely convert the Stryker unit, which uses heavy, eight-wheeled vehicles, to an infantry brigade.</p> <p>“I think right now the purpose of Army forces in Alaska is much more about creating an extreme cold weather capable formation” that could be used in Europe or the Indo-Pacific, Wormuth told The Associated Press on a recent trip to Alaska to meet with senior commanders and troops. “We’re trying to get to a place where we have Arctic capable forces — forces that can survive and operate in that environment.”</p>

The U.S. has long viewed the Arctic as [a growing area of competition](#) with Russia and China, particularly as [climate change](#) brings warmer temperatures and opens the sea lanes for longer periods of time. But officials have acknowledged that the U.S. lags behind those nations. Russia has taken steps to increase its military presence there, and China views the region as economically valuable for shipping and natural resources.

The changes in the Army were under consideration well before U.S. tensions with Russia soared following its invasion of Ukraine.

Under the new Army plan, the 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, now based in Alaska, would be converted to a light infantry brigade. Combined with the division's 4th Infantry Brigade Combat team, the two units will become the 11th Airborne Division, based in Alaska. And the large Stryker vehicles, which are somewhat old, would be replaced by other vehicles that are more suitable for the icy and snowy terrain, Wormuth said.

The greater focus on cold-weather war includes a move to conduct major training exercises for the Alaska-based troops in their home state, under the weather conditions they would face in an Arctic fight. The troops had been scheduled to go to the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, Louisiana, in March, but Army leaders decided to keep them in Alaska so they could train under the frigid temperatures and frozen terrain that they would encounter in any cold-weather battle.

"I think it really makes sense to have forces trained in the Arctic environments that they would be used for," Wormuth said after spending two days at the still snowy base. "If we're going to have ground forces in Alaska, that's what we need them to be able to do. They can't get that experience going to the Mojave Desert or to Fort Polk."

Last year, in an initial trial event, Pacific-based forces stayed in Hawaii for their scheduled exercises at the National Training Center in California's Mohave Desert. Commanders said they have learned from these first two moves, as they try to recreate conditions and relocate personnel and equipment from well-established training centers to more remote locations.

During her visit to Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Wormuth met with commanders who called the training shift a success. Maj. Gen. Brian Eifler, commander of U.S. Army Alaska, said the benefits outweighed any shortfalls created by the need to build the infrastructure for the training exercise in the remote north.

"You're getting the best of both worlds, without losing too much," Eifler said. "We did get a lot more out of it than we thought we would."

Eifler said that while they didn't have as many training observers or civilian role players as they would have at one of the training centers, the trainers that did come were able to learn more about Arctic weather operations.

In addition, Eifler said, the change avoided the costly and time-consuming shipment of vehicles, weapons and other equipment to Louisiana and back. The lengthy packing and shipping process before and after a training exercise in Louisiana or California often forces troops to be without their weapons systems and other equipment for weeks.

During briefings at the Alaska base, commanders said the training included large-scale combat operations under extreme weather conditions in what they called the "most challenging environment on earth." They said that 10,000 troops — including Canadian Army and Air forces — were involved in the exercise.

But they said the exercise also underscored the need for better cold-weather vehicles, including those capable of carrying Arctic infantry forces.

Gen. Joseph Martin, the vice chief of the Army who was in Alaska this year, said the service has been studying what would be the best type of vehicle for the troops. “Is the Stryker the right vehicle for an Arctic warrior? In the winter, you need vehicles that can move across snow,” he said.

In addition, he said, the vehicle also needs to be able to operate in the spring or summer thaw, when the ground turns to mud.

As Wormuth wrapped up her visit, she suggested that the decision on the Stryker Brigade is moving forward soon. Any final decision would need approval from Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin.

“If you’re going to do big movements of equipment and things like that, the summer is a pretty important window because it’s a lot easier to move vehicles around than doing it in the dead of winter,” she said.

And in conversations with congressional lawmakers, including during a hearing this week, she made clear that the change would not reduce the number of soldiers in Alaska. Instead, she said that while the infantry brigade will be smaller, the Army would offset that loss by increasing the size and capabilities of the headquarters.

More broadly, she talked with commanders in Alaska about the potential need for more changes as the U.S. military’s Arctic strategy evolves.

The U.S., Wormuth said, has resisted moves to militarize the Arctic, even as Russia has expanded its military presence and basing there. But, she said, “will that mindset continue given what the Russians are doing in Ukraine? Or will that get revisited? Will that create a window to think about things differently?”

Commanders said there are questions about whether one of the Pentagon’s combatant commands — such as European Command or Northern Command, based in Colorado — should take full ownership of the Arctic and the U.S. military role there. Wormuth said the issue needs further discussion, and any decision may be years away.

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HEADLINE	05/11 Fleeing troops left behind Russia war plan?
SOURCE	https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/putin-s-precious-war-plan-left-behind-by-fleeing-russian-troops-officials-say/ar-AAXaaQ5
GIST	<p>Russian President Vladimir Putin had plans to take all of Ukraine, according to abandoned Russian documents which Ukrainian authorities reportedly found in the Ukrainian town of Trostyanets in Sumy Oblast.</p> <p>The documents, which Ukrainian authorities said they found while investigating Trostyanets, a northeastern Ukrainian town Russian troops occupied for a month during the war, suggest that while Russia is currently focusing its attacks on the Donbas in eastern Ukraine, Putin’s ambitions lie far beyond the east.</p> <p>“Investigators... found important documents of soldiers of the Russian Federation's Armed Forces that give a clear understanding that Russia was preparing to seize all the territory of Ukraine,” Ukraine’s State Bureau of Investigation Chief Oleksiy Sukhachev said in a statement. “All this information will be studied.”</p> <p>The Russian forces that occupied Trostyanets had set up a headquarters in the town’s train station, according to France 24. The Russian military was using Trostyanets as a passage route to make way for tanks to head towards the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, in an effort to seize the capital, The New York Times reported.</p> <p>But the Russian military met a flurry of resistance from the Ukrainians on the way, and eventually backed off their plans to take the capital, making the plans to pass through Trostyanets transform into more of an</p>

occupation. As [Russian forces regrouped](#) and refocused their invasion on Eastern Ukraine, [Ukrainians liberated the town](#).

The Daily Beast has not independently verified the documents.

But Putin's alleged plans to occupy all of Ukraine appear to confirm assessments from western nations and U.S. intelligence officials that the Kremlin's plans in Ukraine have been expansive and aimed at overtaking more than just Eastern Ukraine.

When [Putin launched the invasion](#) in February, he announced a "special military operation" aimed at Eastern Ukraine. But the announcement masked his true aims, according to U.S. intelligence community assessments. His aim was to take Kyiv swiftly and in a matter of days, CIA Director Bill Burns said in testimony on Capitol Hill in March.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization has assessed that Putin planned to control all of Ukraine entirely. "We have seen no indication that President Putin has changed his ambition to control the whole of Ukraine and also to rewrite the international order," NATO's Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg told reporters in April.

Even [Russian military leaders have admitted their goals in Ukraine](#) are greater than the current fight in Eastern Ukraine and that they want "full control" of both the east and southern portions of Ukraine.

"Since the beginning of the second stage of the special operation... one of the tasks of the Russian army has been to take full control of Donbas and southern Ukraine," Central Military District Commander Rustam Minnekayev said in late April. "That will ensure the opening of a land corridor to Crimea and influence critical elements of the Ukrainian economy."

And while Russian forces had to refocus their efforts on just the eastern regions of Ukraine following a series of fumbles and logistical errors in efforts to take Kyiv and attack in the west of Ukraine, Putin will not be ending the fight in Eastern Ukraine, in all likelihood, [top U.S. intelligence officials are warning](#) this week. Just Tuesday, the U.S. Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines told lawmakers in a brief that Putin has his sights set on other regions beyond Eastern Ukraine.

"We assess President Putin is preparing for prolonged conflict in Ukraine during which he still intends to achieve goals beyond the Donbas," Haines said.

A senior U.S. defense official said in a call Tuesday Putin may not have given up entirely on his original aims in Ukraine.

"It's not clear to us the degree to which any of Mr. Putin's strategic objectives have changed," the senior official said. "We don't know that he's given up on Kyiv particularly."

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HEADLINE	05/12 Navy to scrap 9 relatively new warships
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/12/politics/us-navy-scrap-warships/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN)The chief of the US Navy defended the service's plans to scrap nine relatively new warships in the coming fiscal year even as the service tries to keep up with China's growing fleet. Three of the littoral combat ships slated for decommissioning are less than three years old.</p> <p>Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Michael Gilday told the House Armed Services Committee Wednesday that the anti-submarine ships could not perform their primary mission.</p> <p>"I refuse to put an additional dollar against a system that would not be able to track a high-end submarine in today's environment," Gilday told the committee. He said the main reason for the early retirement was that the anti-submarine warfare system on the ships "did not work out technically." The decommissioning</p>

of the ships would save the Navy approximately \$391 million, according to the service's proposed FY23 budget.

But that recoups only a fraction of the cost of the nine littoral combat ships, which totaled about \$3.2 billion.

The USS Indianapolis, USS Billings and USS Wichita were all commissioned in 2019, which means the Navy plans on decommissioning ships that are only a fraction of the way into their expected service life. The Navy also plans to retire six other littoral combat ships, all of the single-hull Freedom-variant, as opposed to the trimaran Independence-variant. Both variants can achieve speeds of 40+ knots.

Under a 2016 Navy plan, the Freedom-class variants were all homeported Mayport, Florida, mainly for use in Atlantic Ocean operations. The Independence-class variants were homeported in San Diego, and designated for mainly Pacific operations.

The decision amounts to an embarrassing admission that some of the Navy's newest ships are not fit for modern warfare.

Despite the Navy's plans to scrap the warships, Congress has the final say on the military budget and has balked at previous requests to decommission ships. Reducing the number of warships may be even more difficult as lawmakers focus on the growing size of China's navy and the gap between the US and Chinese fleets.

Last August, Vice President Kamala Harris visited the USS Tulsa, one of the Independence-class ships, while it was operating out of Singapore. She touted the Navy's mission of "helping to guarantee peace and security, freedom of trade and commerce, freedom of navigation" and the role the ship plays in countering an increasingly assertive China in the western Pacific Ocean.

But the embattled littoral combat ships have faced perennial problems, including repeated breakdowns and questions about their limited armament.

The ships were hailed as part of the US deterrent against China as they they were designed to operate in shallow waters like the South China Sea. But the decommissioning of so many in one year appears to be an acknowledgment that the expensive surface combatants have failed to live up to expectations.

'We can't use them'

Rep. Adam Smith, chair of the House Armed Services Committee, said, "We can't use them, number one because they're not ready to do anything. Number two, when they are, they still break down."

"They're incredibly expensive, and they don't have the capabilities that we expected. So regardless of how old they are, that's a lot of money to be spent to get pretty close to nothing," the Washington state Democrat continued.

Republican Oklahoma Sen. Jim Inhofe, ranking member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, joined in criticizing the Navy.

"With the Chinese Navy steadily climbing to 460 ships by 2030, the unforced errors in Navy shipbuilding, like the Littoral Combat Ship, must stop. Programs that can scale up and grow our fleet must be the priority," Inhofe tweeted Wednesday.

Many of the myriad problems facing the littoral combat ship program stem from the lack of mission focus during the design process, said Emma Salisbury, a researcher at the University of London focusing on the US military weapons manufacturers.

"The LCS was essentially counted to solve every single one of the Navy's problems all at once and everything will be wonderful," Salisbury told CNN with a note of irony. The missions for the ships

included surface warfare, mine countermeasures, and anti-submarine warfare, based on a modular design that was supposed to allow the Navy to customize the ship for the role.

"It was basically this magical design that would solve everything," Salisbury said. "So that was the problem -- that, because it had all of these options, it never did any of them very well."

Pentagon press secretary John Kirby defended the program and the ships at a press briefing in mid-April, saying that "they served a purpose."

Yet even as the Navy plans on scrapping nine of the Freedom-variant ships, the newest ship in the class was just christened this past weekend. The USS Beloit marked the milestone with members of Congress and Navy officials in attendance, as well as the ceremonial breaking of a bottle of wine across the bow.

Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro said in a statement the ship would "be ready to respond to any mission, wherever, and whenever, there is a need."

The Independence-variant of the LCS has faced its own problems. The Navy has identified structural cracks on six of these ships, requiring updates to inspection procedures and a redesign of the affected areas, according to a statement from Alan Baribreau, a spokesman for Naval Sea Systems Command. The cracks, first reported by Navy Times, were initially discovered in late-2019 in high-stress areas on the structure of the ship.

"The issue was identified following routine quality assurance checks and does not pose a risk to the safety of Sailors on board the ships. Similarly, the issue poses no safety risk to the ships affected nor does it hinder the ability to get underway and execute missions," Baribreau said.

The Navy plans on retiring two of these Independence-class ships in the 2024 fiscal year.

At the same time, the Navy is working on developing a new class of ships more suited to the challenges from China's rapidly expanding military and the threat Russia poses. These ships would have "more capability than the LCS" for the potential fights of the future, Kirby said.

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HEADLINE	05/12 Russia views Finland NATO as threat
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/world/kremlin-finland-nato-move-threat-to-russia
GIST	<p>The Kremlin on Thursday said Finland's push to join NATO is a direct threat to Russia as well as the stability of the European continent and vowed to respond accordingly.</p> <p>"Finland's entry into NATO will become a threat to Russia," Dmitry Peskov, press secretary to Russian President Vladimir Putin, told Russian media outlets. "The next expansion of NATO does not make our continent more stable and secure."</p> <p>"Of course, all this will become elements for a special analysis and development of the necessary measures in order to balance the situation and ensure our security," he added.</p> <p>The comments came after Finnish leaders on Thursday urged their country's officials to initiate the NATO application process "without delay" and argued the backing of the 30-member alliance was vital to Helsinki's security.</p> <p>Finland, a traditionally neutral nation in Northern Europe that shares a border with Russia, began to look to the military alliance along with neighboring Sweden after Russia invaded Ukraine in late February.</p> <p>NATO expansion has been chief among Putin's security concerns and was a contributing factor as to why he launched his invasion of Ukraine, which had previously looked to join the 30-member alliance.</p>

	<p>NATO membership grants security support for each nation that joins under the Article 5 pledge that declares that an attack on one nation will trigger an attack from the entire alliance.</p> <p>Western officials have long argued that Putin intended to weaken NATO by causing discord in Europe upon invading Ukraine – a war that has resulted in the largest humanitarian crisis in Europe since World War II.</p> <p>But instead, nations are now looking to expand the alliance over concerns that Putin could extend his conflict beyond Ukraine’s borders.</p> <p>Moscow last month threatened to deploy nuclear weapons and hypersonic missiles along its western border with Finland should it or Sweden expand NATO membership.</p> <p>The U.S., U.K. and Germany have pledged security guarantees for Helsinki and Stockholm while they await admittance into the alliance.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/12 DEA: National Fentanyl Awareness Day
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/law-enforcement-and-public-safety/dea-recognizes-first-ever-national-fentanyl-awareness-day/
GIST	<p>In an effort to save lives, DEA is proud to join “Song for Charlie” and many of our valued public health, non-profit, and law enforcement partners in recognizing the first ever National Fentanyl Awareness Day. This day is an effort to educate individuals around the dangerous threat that fentanyl poses to the safety, health, and national security of the American people.</p> <p>To mark National Fentanyl Awareness Day, DEA released a video announcement from DEA Administrator Anne Milgram stressing the dangers of fentanyl and the need for urgent action.</p> <p>“Fentanyl is killing Americans at unprecedented rates,” said Milgram. “On this first-ever National Fentanyl Awareness Day, please help save lives by making sure you talk with your friends and family about the dangers of this deadly drug.”</p> <p>Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that is approximately 50 times more potent than heroin and 100 times more potent than morphine. It is inexpensive, widely available, and highly addictive. Drug traffickers are increasingly mixing fentanyl with other illicit drugs—in powder and pill form—to drive addiction and create repeat customers. Many people who are overdosing and dying don’t even know that they are taking fentanyl.</p> <p>The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that in the United States, nearly 107,000 people died as the result of a drug overdose in the 12-month period ending November 2021. Sixty-six percent of overdose deaths involved synthetic opioids such as fentanyl.</p> <p>DEA has created a special exhibit for its museum, <i>The Faces of Fentanyl</i>, to commemorate the lives lost from fentanyl poisoning. If you would like to submit a photo of a loved one lost to fentanyl, please submit their name and photo to fentanylawareness@dea.gov, or post a photo and their name to social media using the hashtag #NationalFentanylAwarenessDay.</p> <p>For more information on the dangers of fentanyl, visit www.DEA.gov/fentanylawareness.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/11 Auburn police face lawsuits, charges
SOURCE	https://www.kentreporter.com/northwest/auburn-police-face-multiple-lawsuits-charges/

In recent months, the Auburn Police Department has made headlines for various lawsuits and criminal charges against three of its officers.

Here's an overview of the different civil and criminal cases facing the Auburn Police Department, the city and some of its officers.

Kenneth Lyman

Officer Kenneth Lyman is the cause of two personal injury lawsuits against the City of Auburn that are currently open.

The first lawsuit against the city regarding Lyman was filed by Peter Manning in January 2022.

In 2020, Lyman reportedly crashed a SWAT vehicle into Manning's stopped work truck and then fled the scene without checking on Manning or exchanging information, according to police records. Manning was injured as a result of this hit-and-run and racked up over \$20,000 in medical bills.

In addition to medical bills, Manning said, due to the injuries he sustained in the crash, he has not been able to do the same amount or intensity of work and has suffered losses in pay as a result.

Manning's lawsuit against the city claims Manning was injured by the negligent and willful actions of the Valley SWAT team for which he claims the City of Auburn and the Auburn Police Department are liable. Manning is seeking at least \$100,000 in relief from the city.

An internal investigation into Lyman's actions found he reportedly committed multiple acts of misconduct because he broke state laws and department policy. Lyman was given a written reprimand as punishment.

The second lawsuit against the city regarding Lyman was filed in April 2022 by the family of Enosa Strickland Jr., a man who was allegedly shot and killed by Lyman in 2019.

A memo sent from Snohomish County Prosecuting Attorney Adam Cornell regarding his investigation into the shooting on Feb. 21, 2021, provided additional information about the lawsuit. Cornell ultimately decided Lyman's use of deadly force was justified, according to the memo.

In the spring of 2019, a woman called the police on Strickland Jr. because he allegedly wasn't leaving the parking lot of her apartment complex, according to the memo. When Lyman and another officer arrived, they determined Strickland Jr. had not committed a crime but was under the influence and unable to drive, according to the memo.

While the three men were waiting for Strickland Jr.'s parents to arrive, a fight broke out and Lyman and the other officer ended up on top of Strickland Jr., who was face down on the ground. Lyman reportedly shot and killed Strickland Jr., claiming Strickland was holding a knife Lyman kept on his chest, according to the memo.

The woman who called the police said she heard police tell Strickland Jr. to drop the knife to which Strickland Jr. replied "What knife?" She said moments later she heard a metal object hit the ground, then moments after that a gunshot, according to the memo.

Strickland Jr.'s family is suing the department for wrongful death and violation of civil rights. It faults the City of Auburn for negligence and deliberate indifference in training its officers.

The lawsuit claims the family is eligible to damages due to the emotional pain and suffering officer Lyman caused by using excessive force against Strickland Jr. It also pointed out that the knife Lyman was carrying was in violation of department policy as it was a fixed-blade dagger style knife. Officers are only permitted to carry a single, folding knife while on duty, according to the police department policy.

Lyman is still working for the Auburn Police Department.

Jeffrey Nelson

Auburn police officer Jeffrey Nelson is currently awaiting trial for the murder and assault of Jesse Sarey in 2019. Despite being on house arrest, he is still employed by the City of Auburn.

In May 2019, Nelson reportedly shot and killed Jesse Sarey after attempting to arrest Sarey for jaywalking. Over a year later in 2020, King County Prosecutor Dan Satterberg filed assault and second-degree murder charges against Nelson for the killing of Sarey.

Satterberg's office claims Nelson did not follow his training in several ways and his failure to do so escalated the situation with Sarey needlessly. It also claims Nelson's use of deadly force was unreasonable.

After Nelson's defense delayed the trial several times, Judge Nicole Gaines Phelps decided jury selection will begin the week after Thanksgiving and the trial will start in January 2023.

Nelson pleaded not guilty to the charges on Aug. 24, 2020.

Sarey is the third person Nelson reportedly killed over a nine-year span while working as an Auburn police officer.

On Aug. 20, 2020 — the same day the King County Prosecutor's Office announced the charges against Nelson for shooting Sarey — the family of Isaiah Obet, another man shot and killed by Nelson, announced the City of Auburn agreed to pay them \$1.25 million for the wrongful death of Obet. The city agreed to settle the lawsuit before the discovery process began.

Michael Smith

Auburn police officer Michael Smith was charged with hit and run, vehicular homicide and reckless driving stemming from two crashes in Seattle last month.

At around 10:30 p.m. on Saturday, April 23, Smith, who was off-duty, allegedly crashed his Mercedes-Benz into a taxi cab while both cars were driving northbound on Alaskan Way in downtown Seattle, according to charging documents. Both cars came to a stop and Smith allegedly tried to drag the cab driver out of his seat. After he was unsuccessful, Smith got back in his car and sped off without exchanging information.

A few minutes later, Smith allegedly lost control of his car and jumped a curb, sideswiping a telephone pole before striking a 65-year-old man who was on the sidewalk, according to charging documents. The man was killed almost instantly, charging documents say.

When Seattle police arrived they determined Smith was likely drunk and he reportedly admitted to drinking at a Mariner's game prior to the crash, charging documents say. Police brought the passenger of the taxicab to the second scene and she positively identified Smith as the man who crashed into the taxi and tried to pull the driver out of the car, charging documents say.

Data from Smith's car recorded Smith was driving 85 mph five seconds before the crash — the speed limit is 30 mph on the road he was driving down, charging documents say.

Police arrested Smith for DUI and vehicular homicide that night.

Smith pleaded not guilty to the charges on May 11.

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HEADLINE	05/11 Al Jazeera journalist killed in West Bank
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/11/al-jazeera-journalist-killed-in-west-bank-unrest

Al Jazeera has accused Israel of deliberately killing one of its reporters during a military raid in the occupied West Bank town of Jenin.

Shireen Abu Akleh, 51, a Palestinian American and one of the Arab world's best-known journalists, who had covered the conflict for decades, was shot in the head on Wednesday morning and taken to hospital in a critical condition.

She had been covering a military raid in the Jenin refugee camp, a stronghold of the Palestinian Fatah movement and historical flashpoint in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Abu Akleh was wearing a helmet and body armour clearly marked "press". The Qatar-based television network said her colleagues at the scene said the veteran reporter was shot by Israeli forces.

Al Jazeera called on the international community to hold Israeli forces accountable for their "intentional targeting and killing" of Abu Akleh. "In a blatant murder, violating international laws and norms, the Israeli occupation forces assassinated in cold blood Al Jazeera's correspondent in Palestine," it said.

Shatha Hanaysha, a journalist for Quds News Network who witnessed the incident, said: "Even after she fell to the ground the fire did not stop and none of us were able to reach her. A guy was finally able to reach us; he helped me and started pulling her.

"We were a group wearing press gear, and Shireen was even wearing the helmet. So it is obvious that the one who shot her meant to hit an exposed part of her body. This is an assassination."

The Israeli military said its troops shot back after coming under "massive fire" in Jenin and that "there is a possibility, now being looked into, that reporters were hit – possibly by shots fired by Palestinian gunmen."

The Israeli prime minister, Naftali Bennett, claimed there was "a considerable chance that armed Palestinians, who fired wildly, were the ones who brought about the journalist's unfortunate death."

But later on Wednesday the Israeli military chief, Lt Gen Aviv Kochavi, appeared to back away from officials' earlier assertions that Palestinians were to blame, saying: "At this stage we cannot determine by whose fire she was harmed and we regret her death."

The Palestinian health ministry confirmed Abu Akleh's death and said a second Al Jazeera employee, Ali Samodi, a producer, was wounded.

Samodi told the New Palestinian from hospital: "We were there to cover the events in Jenin camp. All of a sudden [the Israelis] opened fire at us, they didn't ask us to leave or stop. The first bullet hit me, the second one hit Shireen ... There were no resistance fighters around us. If there were, we wouldn't have been in that area."

In comments to Agence France-Presse, the Israel Defence Forces firmly denied they had deliberately targeted journalists. The Israeli foreign minister, Yair Lapid, said Israel had "offered the Palestinians a joint pathological investigation".

The White House said it strongly condemned Abu Akleh's killing and called for a thorough investigation to determine the circumstances of her death, as did Tom Nides, the US ambassador to Israel.

The Palestinian Authority president, Mahmoud Abbas, said he held the Israeli military fully responsible for Abu Akleh's death.

Violence has surged in Jenin in recent weeks. Israeli security forces have stepped up operations in the area after a spate of deadly terrorist attacks targeting Israelis that have left 19 people dead, launching near-daily raids on the hunt for terrorism suspects. Several of the attackers came from the Jenin area.

Three Arab-Israelis and 28 Palestinians have died, among them Abu Akleh, an unarmed woman and two apparent bystanders, as well as the perpetrators of attacks and Palestinian gunmen fighting with Israeli forces during the raids.

Accompanying clashes at Jerusalem's al-Aqsa mosque compound, a site holy for Jews and Muslims, have also raised fears of escalation between Israel and Hamas, the Palestinian militant group in control of the Gaza Strip.

Hamas has refrained from claiming responsibility for most of the recent terror attacks against Israelis, but in speeches leaders have praised the violence and called on Palestinians to carry out more, leading Israel to warn of retaliatory measures.

Israel and Hamas fought an 11-day-war last May, in part triggered by unrest at al-Aqsa, in which 256 Gazans and 14 people in Israel died. Last year's fighting was the third round of full-scale conflict between the Israeli state and the Palestinian militant group since Hamas seized control of Gaza in 2007 and Israel and Egypt imposed a punishing blockade.

In April, UK-based lawyers with the International Federation of Journalists filed submissions to the international criminal court alleging a "systematic targeting of journalists" by Israeli forces.

At least 144 Palestinian journalists have been wounded by Israeli forces across the Gaza Strip, West Bank and East Jerusalem since 2018, hurt by live fire and rubber bullets, as well as stun grenades, teargas and beatings with batons, according to Reporters Without Borders.

The Palestinian film-maker Yaser Murtaja was the last journalist to be killed covering the conflict, shot by Israeli snipers during protests on the Gaza Strip frontier in 2018. Another journalist, Yousef Abu Hussein, was killed when his home was hit by an airstrike during the bombing of Gaza last May.

Abu Akleh had worked for Al Jazeera since 1997 and was well known across the Arab world for her reporting during the second intifada, or uprising, against the Israeli occupation, and Israeli-Palestinian affairs since.

"Shireen was a brave, kind, and high-integrity journalist that I and millions of Palestinians grew up watching," the prominent Ramallah-based activist Fadi Quran said in a tweet, calling her death "a devastating tragedy".

As news of her death spread, Abu Akleh's home in East Jerusalem was raided by Israeli security forces who confiscated Palestinian flags and prevented mourners from playing nationalistic songs. Demonstrators marched through the Beit Hanina neighbourhood until they were stopped by Israeli police, one resident said.

The reporter's body was transferred from Nablus to Ramallah on Wednesday afternoon for an autopsy on the orders of the Palestinian public prosecution.

A crowd gathered near Al Jazeera's offices in the Palestinian Authority's administrative centre to honour the journalist after her body arrived in an ambulance. A funeral will be held on Friday morning at the Palestinian presidency headquarters in Ramallah.

During last year's war in Gaza, an Israeli airstrike destroyed a building housing the local offices of Al Jazeera and the Associated Press. Residents were warned to evacuate and no one was hurt in the strike. Israel said Hamas was using the building as a command centre but provided no evidence.

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HEADLINE	05/11 Sheriff: KCSO is 'paramilitary organization'
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SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3468964/newly-appointed-king-county-sheriff-calls-her-department-a-paramilitary-organization/
GIST	<p>Interim sheriff Patti Cole-Tindall described her department as a “paramilitary organization” one week before her council hearing and confirmation vote to be sworn in as King County Sheriff.</p> <p>“We are a paramilitary organization. We have accountability here at the sheriff’s office, and we will hold people accountable if we learned that they are actively working against the mission and goal of this agency,” Cole-Tindall told Gee and Ursula on KIRO Newsradio.</p> <p>Cole-Tindall doubled down on that description, describing her office the same way again in response to a question about internal accountability.</p> <p>“By our leadership team and myself as the sheriff, demonstrating that behavior, I believe that that will reflect in how our employees act and react and how they show up. So we, as a paramilitary organization, hold people accountable for when they don’t do the things that we are supposed to do,” Cole-Tindall said.</p> <p>Following a nationwide search and extensive interviews, King County Executive Dow Constantine announced his appointment of Patti Cole-Tindall to serve as King County Sheriff on May 3.</p> <p>Cole-Tindall served as the County’s Director of Labor Relations, advising Constantine and the County Council on strategic planning, labor policy, and employment law. She held that position until 2015, when she joined the King County Sheriff’s Office in October 2015, serving as the Chief of Technical Services Division for almost five years before becoming Undersheriff in 2020.</p> <p>When she was appointed to Interim Sheriff in November 2021, she didn’t consider becoming the King County Sherriff long term.</p> <p>“Even at the press conference, when the executive [Constantine] named me as interim, I was asked that question. I said, ‘absolutely not,’” Cole-Tindall said. “I am not going to apply because I believe it would distract and take me away from the things that needed to be done that I felt needed to be done immediately with the agency.”</p> <p>“People within the agency, people in the community, some of our labor unions, and some on the county council asked me, ‘won’t you reconsider?’ And, you know, I really in the beginning, even at that point, I was like, ‘no, no, no,’” she continued. “I never woke up and said, ‘hey, I want to be the sheriff.’ But as we continued this work, I really started to give it some serious thought. And I thought, well, why not me?”</p> <p>Cole-Tindall was appointed sheriff by Constantine, her former direct superior when she was the County’s Director of Labor Relations. She also donated to his campaigns from 2009 to 2015.</p> <p>“Yes, I did contribute to Dow Constantine. I have not since I came to the sheriff’s office,” Cole-Tindall said. “But also, when I was here at the sheriff’s office, I did contribute to John Urquhart’s campaign for sheriff. I mean, it’s my decision as an individual. And I think most directors or people in high-level positions decide to support whoever their bosses, and when I worked for Dow directly, I did contribute.”</p> <p>“I know there was some that thought; that’s why he made me sheriff. I’m thinking, ‘really?’ I mean, that’s farther from the case,” she continued. “I believe I was the best choice. But I did contribute. Yes.”</p>
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HEADLINE	05/12 China economic slowdown global ripple
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinas-economic-slowdown-is-rippling-all-around-the-world-11652347800?mod=hp_lead_pos6
GIST	For decades, the world has depended on China as a massive factory floor and market. As the country’s economic growth crumbles , the pain is spreading globally.

[Lockdowns aimed at stamping out Covid-19](#) are throttling activity in the world's second-largest economy. Overseas [demand for China's exports is fading](#) as economies wrestle with surging prices and rising interest rates.

The effects of China's slowdown are showing up everywhere from German factories to Australian tourist spots. Exports are weakening in Asia as China's neighbors watch their largest market sag. Companies including [Apple](#) Inc. and [General Electric](#) Co. warned investors about production and delivery problems stemming from China's troubles, as well as dwindling sales.

[Car sales in China have collapsed](#), hitting auto makers including [BMW](#) maker [Bayerische Motoren Werke](#) AG, [Volkswagen](#) AG and [Tesla](#) Inc. Tesla sold just 1,512 cars made at its Shanghai plant in April, down 98% from the more than 65,000 it sold in March, according to data released Tuesday by the China Passenger Car Association. [Toyota Motor](#) Corp. on Tuesday apologized for repeatedly missing its production plans, in part because of lockdowns in China, saying it expects to churn out 700,000 vehicles in May rather than the 750,000 it previously expected.

China's deceleration represents a double whammy for the global economy. The country isn't just a huge market for the rest of the world's goods, components and raw materials, but it is the manufacturing dynamo at the center of global trade.

That means its weakening economy is bad news for commodity exporters such as Brazil, Chile or Australia that supply China with oil, copper and iron ore. It is bad news for manufacturing powerhouses such as Germany, Taiwan and South Korea that rely on China as a huge market for machinery, cars and semiconductors, as well as a critical link in world-wide supply chains for their companies.

And it is bad news for the U.S., where [galloping inflation is squeezing](#) household budgets. Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell warned last week that, alongside the war in Ukraine, China's economic woes could aggravate inflationary pressures in the U.S. if they prevent the healing of supply chains that is essential to help cool inflation.

"Everyone has exposure," said Carlos Casanova, senior economist for Asia at Union Bancaire Privée in Hong Kong. "Whatever happens in China significantly impacts global growth."

China in 2021 accounted for 18.1% of global gross domestic product, according to International Monetary Fund data, behind the U.S. at 23.9% but ahead of the 27 members of the European Union at 17.8%. It accounts for almost a third of global manufacturing output, according to United Nations data from 2020. China's economy expanded modestly at the beginning of the year but data for March and April point to a sharp slowdown.

Beijing's zero-tolerance strategy for smothering Covid-19 outbreaks led to strict lockdowns in manufacturing hubs like Jilin province in China's northeast and megacities like Shenzhen and Shanghai. Tight controls have kept millions at home, shut factories and stores and crippled transportation, adding more pressure to an economy that was already feeling the pain of a real-estate downturn and regulatory crackdowns on high-growth sectors like technology and education.

Official data Monday showed Chinese export growth slowed sharply in April, as lockdowns hammered factories and global demand waned, especially in Europe and Japan. After adjusting for inflation, imports of iron ore were 13% lower than a year earlier, imports of copper were down 4% and imports of cars and chassis were down 8%, according to economists at Nomura.

Some economists expect China's economy to shrink in the second quarter compared with the first and joblessness is rising. Top officials have pledged to revive growth with big spending on infrastructure projects, but many economists are skeptical that the government or central bank can do much to reboot the economy while sticking with ultra-strict Covid restrictions.

“China’s policy makers have heralded easing to prevent a growth slowdown—but have yet to fully act,” senior economists at BlackRock Investment Institute, the investment analysis division of the world’s largest asset manager, BlackRock Inc., said in a note to clients Monday, in which they downgraded their stance on Chinese assets to neutral.

The effects of China’s growth stumble are being felt widely. In Lincoln, Neb., Bison Inc., which makes and installs sports equipment for schools, has had projects held up because its suppliers can’t receive switches and other electronic components from China. Those components make it possible to move basketball equipment around school gymnasiums, Chief Executive Nick Cusick said.

“\$80,000 or \$100,000 projects are being delayed because of the lack of some \$200 components,” he said.

Apple said recently that lockdowns in China could cost the company between \$4 billion and \$8 billion in lost sales due to supply-chain problems. General Electric said its healthcare division was facing production and delivery problems because of the lockdowns.

In Japan, Sony Group Corp. and Nintendo Co. said Tuesday that supply constraints linked to China would hurt production of their flagship videogame consoles. Sony Chief Financial Officer Hiroki Totoki said Covid-19 restrictions, including the lockdown in Shanghai, have made it hard for companies there to manufacture and ship parts used in their machines.

In Australia, Fortescue Metals Group Ltd., the world’s No. 4 producer of iron ore, said lockdowns in China have hit steel demand and lifted commodity transport costs. Rio Tinto PLC, the world’s second-biggest mining company by market value, said in a quarterly report in late April that Covid-19 lockdowns pose downside risks to near-term construction activity in China.

At one of the world’s largest lavender farms in Tasmania, Australia, Managing Director Robert Ravens said some 85,000 people visited every year before the pandemic, with a significant number arriving from China. Mr. Ravens said that while he has seen more international visitors at Bridestowe Lavender Estate since borders reopened to tourists in February, few have been from China.

“I cannot sense that China will return to its pre-Covid numbers in the foreseeable future,” Mr. Ravens said.

Taiwan and South Korea’s exports to China in April each fell 3.9% compared with March, according to economists at Goldman Sachs. The slide highlights how some Asian economies are tightly plugged into China’s industrial engine, making them especially vulnerable to a slowdown.

Data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development show that whereas Chinese parts and other inputs account for around 1.4% of the value of U.S. goods exports to the rest of the world, in South Korea they account for 5.2%, in Taiwan, 6.3% and in Vietnam, 14.4%.

In Europe, German manufacturing output recorded its biggest month-on-month decline in March since the start of the pandemic in 2020, reflecting the ripples from China but also the fallout from Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

BMW last week reported a 19% decline in production volume in the first three months of 2022 compared with a year earlier, citing global supply bottlenecks for components as well as China’s lockdowns. Vehicle deliveries to China declined by about 9% during the quarter, BMW said.

Sportswear manufacturer Adidas AG said its revenue in China decreased by 35% in the first three months of the year from a year earlier, while higher sourcing and freight costs ate into profitability.

“China is so important for us as a marketplace,” Jörg Wuttke, president of the European Union Chamber of Commerce in China, said at a recent news conference. Around 900,000 jobs in Germany

	<p>depend on the Chinese market, he said, while German companies employ close to one million people in China.</p> <p>Mr. Wuttke said he expects the worst of the Covid-related disruption from the recent lockdowns hasn't even been felt in Europe yet, as shipments that were supposed to leave China during the last couple of months would only now start to arrive in European ports.</p> <p>The amount of drag China puts on the global economy will depend on how severe the country's downturn gets. Fortescue Metals and Rio Tinto both said they are optimistic that Chinese demand will recover and some economists are hopeful that ebbing caseloads and government stimulus will propel faster growth later in the year. With Western demand easing, supply-chain strains may not get as bad as they were last year, some analysts say.</p> <p>In the U.S., businesses took advantage of some improvement in supply chains early in the year to replenish depleted inventories. Business inventories rose 12.4% in February from a year earlier, the biggest increase in records going back to 1993.</p> <p>That should provide a cushion to further disruption, said Phil Levy, chief economist at freight forwarding technology company Flexport Inc.—at least for a while.</p> <p>“It matters immensely how long this stuff lasts,” he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/11 Federal surplus reaches record in April
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/federal-surplus-reaches-record-in-april-as-taxes-other-revenue-nearly-double-11652292043?mod=hp_major_pos1#cxrecs_s
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON—Federal revenue almost doubled in April compared with a year earlier, reaching a record and driving a monthly government surplus of \$308 billion, which Treasury officials said also set a record for the largest monthly surplus.</p> <p>Government revenue from taxes and other receipts for the month rose by 97% from a year earlier to \$864 billion, not adjusting for calendar differences, the Treasury Department reported Wednesday. Federal outlays in April fell by 16% to \$555 billion, the Treasury said, reflecting a decline in pandemic-related spending.</p> <p>Still, the federal government spent 32% more on servicing its debt in April compared with a year earlier as persistently high inflation pushed borrowing costs higher.</p> <p>Higher tax receipts reflect strong job growth and a broader economic recovery since a brief recession in 2020 that has fueled wage increases in recent years. Meanwhile, government spending declined as much of the trillions in pandemic aid receded from the economy.</p> <p>April's \$308 billion surplus was the largest recorded in a single month on record, Treasury officials said. Surplus and deficit amounts aren't inflation adjusted. It is only the second monthly surplus recorded since 2019.</p> <p>Historically, it is common for the government to record a surplus in April, the month when many Americans pay their tax bills, but the government delayed the deadline for tax payments in 2020 and 2021 to later in the year. The second-highest level of monthly government revenue came in July 2020, when tax filings were due and government receipts came in at \$564 billion, according to Treasury officials.</p> <p>The combination of lower spending and higher revenue has led to a precipitous drop in the deficit from its pandemic-fueled highs, a trend that the White House has repeatedly touted. Over the course of the first seven months of this fiscal year, the deficit has dropped by roughly \$1.5 trillion as compared with the same period last year.</p>

The nearly \$3 trillion in revenue the government has brought in so far this fiscal year is also a record, according to Treasury officials.

In [a speech Tuesday](#), President [Biden](#) said that the decline in the deficit could help ease inflation, which ran at [an 8.3% annual rate](#) in April as measured by the consumer-price index.

“The deficit has gone down both years I’ve been here. That is not an abstraction. It matters. It matters to families, because reducing the deficit is one of the main ways we can ease inflationary pressures,” he said.

Republicans, including Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R., Ky.), have blamed Mr. Biden and Democrats’ policies for helping fuel inflation. That includes passing a roughly \$2 trillion pandemic-aid package early last year in a party-line vote.

While economists say that the impact of reducing the deficit on inflation depends on how policy makers reduce the deficit, the impact of inflation on government borrowing has been more straightforward: It is becoming more expensive. As the Federal Reserve raises rates and reduces its holdings of Treasuries in a bid to bring down inflation, the yield on the benchmark 10-year Treasury has [hovered around 3%](#), up from roughly 1.5% in December.

The 32% increase on borrowing costs to \$60 billion this April is largely due to the higher cost for inflation-protected Treasuries, according to Treasury officials, with only a small portion of higher borrowing costs this fiscal year due to rising interest rates.

More expensive borrowing costs could challenge a newfound consensus in Washington about deficit-financed government spending. In recent years, policy makers in both parties have largely [shrugged off concerns](#) about the deficit as low interest rates kept borrowing costs down, with lawmakers running up the deficit on tax cuts and emergency spending measures.

With the return of high inflation, some lawmakers have started to again oppose large-scale government spending. Sen. Joe Manchin (D., W.Va.) has [killed many of Democrats’ economic ambitions](#) because of his concerns about exacerbating inflation and widening the deficit.

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HEADLINE	05/11 US intelligence-sharing with Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/05/11/ukraine-us-intelligence-sharing-war/
GIST	<p>The United States is sending billions of dollars in military equipment to Ukraine, including heavy artillery, drones and antitank missiles. Administration officials have publicly enumerated those contributions, practically down to the number of bullets. But they are far more cautious when describing another decisive contribution to Ukraine’s battlefield success: intelligence about the Russian military.</p> <p>Information about the location and movements of Russian forces is flowing to Ukraine in real-time, and it includes satellite imagery and reporting gleaned from sensitive U.S. sources, according to U.S. and Ukrainian officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe the cooperation.</p> <p>“The intelligence is very good. It tells us where the Russians are so that we can hit them,” one Ukrainian official said, using his finger to pantomime a bomb falling on its target.</p> <p>The United States is not at war with Russia, and the assistance it provides is intended for Ukraine’s defense against an illegal invasion, Biden officials have stressed. But practically speaking, U.S. officials have limited control on how their Ukrainian beneficiaries use the military equipment and intelligence.</p> <p>That risks provoking the Kremlin to retaliate against the United States and its allies, and heightens the threat of a direct conflict between the two nuclear powers.</p>

The administration has drawn up guidance around intelligence-sharing that is calibrated to avoid heightening tensions between Washington and Moscow. Given to intelligence personnel at the working level, the guidance has placed two broad prohibitions on the kinds of information that the United States can share with Ukraine, officials said.

First, the United States cannot provide detailed information that would help Ukraine kill Russian leadership figures, such as the most senior military officers or ministers, officials said. Valery Gerasimov, the chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces, and Sergei Shoigu, the defense minister, for example, would fall into that category.

This prohibition does not extend to Russian military officers, including generals, several of whom have died on the battlefield. But a senior defense official said that while the U.S. government is “self-limiting to strategic leadership on paper,” it also has chosen not to provide Ukraine location information for generals.

The United States is not “actively helping them kill generals of any kind,” the defense official said.

The second category of prohibited intelligence-sharing is any information that would help Ukraine attack Russian targets outside Ukraine’s borders, officials said. That rule is meant in part to keep the United States from becoming a party to attacks that Ukraine might launch inside Russia. Those concerns led the administration to halt earlier plans to provide fighter jets, supplied by Poland, which Ukraine could have used to launch attacks on Russian soil.

U.S. officials have not discouraged Ukraine from undertaking those operations on its own.

Ukraine should “do whatever is necessary to defend against Russian aggression,” Secretary of State Antony Blinken told a congressional panel last month. He added that “the tactics of this are their decisions.”

Blinken made his remarks after Ukrainian officials said unexplained fires and explosions against sensitive targets in Russia were justified, without claiming responsibility for them.

In addition to the restricted categories of intelligence-sharing, the United States has a rule against providing what officials call “targeting information” to Ukraine. The United States will not, officials said, tell Ukrainian forces that a particular Russian general has been spotted at a specific location, and then tell or help Ukraine to strike him.

But the United States would share information about the location of, say, command and control facilities — places where Russian senior officers often tend to be found — since it could aid Ukraine in its own defense, officials said. If Ukrainian commanders decided to strike the facility, that would be their call, and if a Russian general were killed in the attack, the United States wouldn’t have targeted him, officials said.

Not targeting Russian troops and locations but providing intelligence that Ukraine uses to help kill Russians may seem like a distinction without a difference. But legal experts said the definition of targeting provides meaningful legal and policy guidance that can help the United States demonstrate it is not a party to the conflict, even as it pours military equipment into Ukraine and turns on a fire hose of intelligence.

“If the U.S. were providing targeting information to a foreign party, and we’re closely involved in targeting decisions, we’re directing those forces and they’re acting as a proxy for us,” said Scott R. Anderson, a former State Department official who was the legal adviser for the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. “That might be seen as getting close to the line of actually attacking Russia, at which point Russia could arguably respond reciprocally.”

“Targeting intelligence is different from other kinds of intelligence-sharing for this reason,” added Anderson, who is now a fellow at the Brookings Institution.

Ukraine's sinking of the Moskva, the flagship of Russia's Black Sea Fleet, illustrates how the United States can provide helpful intelligence that, however indirect, risks pulling the country deeper into the war.

In April, Ukraine spotted the vessel off its shores. Information provided by the United States helped to confirm its identity, according to officials familiar with the matter.

The United States routinely shares intelligence with Ukraine about Russian ships in the Black Sea, which have fired missiles at Ukraine and could be used to support an assault on cities such as Odessa, a senior defense official explained. But, the official stressed, that intelligence is not "specific targeting information on ships." The information is intended to help Ukraine mount a defense. Ukrainian officials could have decided that, rather than strike the Moskva, they should make steps to fortify protections around Odessa or evacuate civilians.

"We did not provide Ukraine with specific targeting information for the Moskva," Pentagon press secretary John Kirby said in a written statement. "We were not involved in the Ukrainians' decision to strike the ship or in the operation they carried out. We had no prior knowledge of Ukraine's intent to target the ship. The Ukrainians have their own intelligence capabilities to track and target Russian naval vessels, as they did in this case."

But absent the intelligence from the United States, Ukraine would have struggled to target the warship with the confidence necessary to expend two valuable Neptune missiles, which were in short supply, according to people familiar with the strike.

The sinking of such an important vessel, and one that had the capability to defend itself against anti-ship missiles, was a humiliation for Russian President Vladimir Putin and one of Ukraine's most dramatic successes in the war so far, analysts said. In keeping with the intelligence-sharing rules, which are designed to avoid escalating the conflict in Putin's eyes, Biden administration officials repeatedly stressed they had not directly aided Ukraine in the attack.

On Friday, the day after The Washington Post and other news organizations revealed the U.S. role in the Moskva strike, Biden made separate calls to CIA Director William J. Burns, Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, a senior administration official said. The president made clear he was upset about the leaks and warned that they undermined the U.S. goal of helping Ukraine, the administration official said.

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HEADLINE	05/11 Where is Russia's oil going?
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2022/05/11/russia-oil-gas-china-india-ukraine/
GIST	<p>Despite the European Union's drastic measures to wind down imports of Russian oil, Moscow still has plenty of buyers — and at prices steep enough to keep government revenue high and its coffers flush. Before the war with Ukraine, Russia sold about half of its 7.85 million barrels a day of crude and refined oil to Europe. But with the war and the E.U.'s vow to abruptly end its reliance on Russian oil and gas, the Kremlin has been benefiting from high world prices while looking for new customers and reorienting its export strategy toward Asia.</p> <p>The windfall shows how hard it is to punish a major oil and gas power such as Russia when so much of the world — especially developing countries — depends on fossil fuels.</p> <p>Even with "severe oil production cuts" expected this year, Russia's tax revenue "will increase significantly to more than \$180 billion due to the spike in oil prices," according to Rystad Energy, an independent research firm advising investors. The figure is 45 percent higher than in 2021.</p> <p>Overall, the pattern of tanker traffic suggests that Russia's exports of crude oil have dropped at most 20 percent, a modest amount given the sanctions effort. A study done for The Washington Post by Spire</p>

Global notes that crude-oil tankers departing Russian ports decreased from an average of 17 per day to 13 per day after U.S. sanctions were announced on March 8.

Russia has sold oil to India and China, which have large, rapidly growing economies and have disregarded international sanctions linked to the war. India's purchases of Russian oil, which once accounted for less than 3 percent of India's consumption, have soared. China was already Russia's biggest Asian customer and needs oil to fuel its burgeoning automobile and petrochemical industries.

But the Asian markets have their limits for Russia. It has finite pipeline capacity in the region, and its oil tankers have to make long journeys to deliver their loads. Over time, that could exact a financial toll on Russia.

Daria Melnik, senior analyst at Rystad Energy, says that Russia's production by 2030 will be 2 million barrels a day lower than before the war — the result of permanent damage from closing down production in wells that cannot be restored.

"In this early phase of sanctions and embargoes, Russia will benefit as higher prices mean tax revenues are significantly higher than in recent years," Melnik said in a report last week. "Pivoting exports to Asia will take time and massive infrastructure investments that in the medium term will see Russia's production and revenues drop precipitously."

Timetables for a complete ban

The nature of oil markets and the slow change in consumption habits mean that relatively small shortfalls can result in large price increases. So while European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen is promising to "phase out Russian oil in an orderly fashion" and in a way that "minimizes the impact on global markets," oil analysts say the massive change will be anything but orderly. Many of the world's biggest oil trading firms interpret E.U. sanctions as forcing them to wind down purchases that aren't "strictly necessary."

Von der Leyen said that "this will be a complete import ban on all Russian oil, seaborne and pipeline, crude and refined." And she [outlined two timetables](#) — phasing out Russian supplies of crude oil in six months and refined products by the end of the year.

Kevin Book, managing director and head of research at ClearView Energy Partners, said that von der Leyen was "making two big bets" — first, that a slow phaseout can protect Europe against sudden price spikes, and second, that a flexible program for reluctant E.U. countries can generate the unanimity necessary for E.U. approval.

"Neither proposition seems a slam dunk," Book said. "If E.U. sanctions are effective and enforced, then the oil market tightens and the price for everybody rises."

Diesel prices in Europe have already soared, hurting motorists, shippers and truckers. Kayrros, a satellite data analysis firm, said the amount of crude in European storage facilities remains "well below" the normal range at this time of year.

And a Eurasia Group report said: "A gradual E.U. phase-out would likely result in ongoing and worsening global market dislocations as European refiners hoard fuel and bid up prices for further imports to prepare for the embargo on Russian fuel. In doing so, they would be tightening the global market for these products." That could get even worse, Book said, if the Group of Seven countries restrict the insuring of oil tankers, many of which fly under the flags of other countries.

Without insurance, most tanker operators will refrain from sending their ships to Russia. Many of those tanker operators or their customers — such as Reliance Industries, a major conglomerate and oil refiner in India — do other kinds of business that could be subject to U.S. or E.U. sanctions.

Regarding the possibility of G-7 sanctions on insurers, the French insurance giant AXA said last week that it “is fully respecting all applicable international sanctions and has stopped underwriting new insurance business with respect to Russian-owned assets located in Russia.” Asked about the prospect of broader sanctions, the company said it was too early to comment.

‘The relationship between Russia and India is much thicker than oil’

While the West studies how to tighten sanctions, Russia has made progress toward its goals.

India, which abstained from votes condemning Russia at the United Nations, is one of the few places willing to purchase Russian oil, and it has been able to do so at deep discounts of more than \$30 per barrel.

In April, purchases made by India soared. It bought 627,000 barrels a day of the benchmark Russian Urals crude, compared with 274,000 barrels a day in March. The April daily figure was 20 times India’s daily average for Russian imports in 2021, according to [S&P Global](#), an international data news company. India’s total [oil consumption](#) last year ran at 4.76 million barrels a day.

“The relationship between Russia and India is much thicker than oil,” RBC Capital Markets wrote in a research note for clients this month. The investment firm noted that Russia is “one of the largest arms suppliers to India with over two-thirds of India’s military outfitted in Russian equipment.” And late last year, the two countries renewed a 10-year defense cooperation pact.

But logistics are challenging, and Russia could face tanker shortages. “It can take a couple of weeks for a tanker to go from Murmansk to Europe but a month to go to India,” said Daniel Yergin, an energy historian and vice chairman of S&P Global. In addition, it must deal with competition from Iraq, a growing oil exporter in Asia.

Russia has eyed China as a growing market for its oil, but new waves of the [coronavirus](#) have led China to lock down citizens in Shanghai and Beijing, sharply reducing economic activity and curtailing the need for oil imports. Analysts say Chinese consumption has dropped by 1 million to 1.5 million barrels a day.

But rather than let the oil seep into world markets, China is building up its onshore storage tanks for future emergencies. That has offset, to a large extent, the release of oil from the U.S. Strategic Petroleum Reserve and boosted prices in the United States and Europe — just when leaders trying to block Russian oil also seek to keep retail prices at the pump within reach of consumers.

“The Russian economy remains surprisingly resilient in the face of international sanctions, with coal-fired power generation, a real-time economic indicator, still holding up exceptionally well,” Halff said. Russians’ air travel is also rising.

“The number of loaded crude tankers leaving Russian ports has been on the rise, indicating continued Russian crude exports and likely relieving pressure on Russia’s oil industry,” Halff said, adding, “Inventory changes at Russian export terminals likewise show robust exports.”

“Combined with the trend in onshore stocks, floating storage levels do not suggest a steep drop in Russian crude output just yet,” he said.

In addition to China and India, discounted Russian barrels are going to Turkey, Georgia and some African nations.

Even after taking into account the discounts on crude oil, Russia is still selling crude at about \$70 a barrel — higher than official prices charged for most of the past eight years, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

Separately, Ukraine's national gas company, Naftogaz, said Wednesday that it could not guarantee shipments of Russian gas across Ukrainian borders and into Europe, because of "unauthorized offtakes" of gas in occupied areas.

"Ukraine no longer bears responsibility for the transmission of Russian gas through Ukrainian territories under Russian military occupation," Naftogaz said in a [statement](#). Company chief executive Yuriy Vitrenko said Russian gas conglomerate Gazprom was still responsible for payments under the contract. If gas is not rerouted to safer areas, the decision could affect a third of Russian gas exports through Ukraine, or just under 3 percent of natural gas demand in the E.U. and Britain, according to [figures](#) from the International Energy Agency.

The E.U.'s path forward

Meanwhile, Europe has made surprising progress toward ending its reliance on Russian petroleum. From May 2021 to February 2022, an average of five tankers per month arrived at German ports carrying Russian crude oil, according to Spire Global, a satellite firm monitoring ship movements. In March, that number sank to two. In April, it was zero.

Pipelines can still provide other oil supplies, but Germany replaced all its Russian imports except the 12 percent that comes by pipeline to the PCK Schwedt refinery, about 60 miles northeast of Berlin.

The refinery is owned by Russia's government-controlled oil giant Rosneft, and the company is — unsurprisingly — unwilling to switch to a different supplier. The German government is changing the law to allow it to expropriate the facility. Then it could replace Russian crude with other imports delivered through Gdansk or Rostock pipelines. German Vice Chancellor Robert Habeck visited Warsaw recently to strike a deal with the Polish government, and negotiations continue.

But additional upheaval seems likely. To preserve the unanimity needed to take action, the E.U. will probably provide flexibility to four members — Hungary, Romania, the Czech Republic and Slovakia — and push ahead with a timetable for the rest of its members to phase out Russian oil. And G-7 foreign ministers meet later this week to weigh how to move forward.

How Russia will respond is unclear. "We are kind of in an energy game of chicken at this point," said Helima Croft, head of global commodity strategy at RBC Capital Markets and a former CIA analyst.

"What if the Russians say, 'You're not getting 12 months [to phase out Russian oil]'?" Croft said. "This is maybe the price the West needs to pay in defense of principle — that you cannot invade a sovereign nation."

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HEADLINE	05/11 Calif. braces for extreme summer drought
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2022/05/11/california-drought-summer-restrictions-snowpack/
GIST	<p>California's water officials on Tuesday continued to paint a grim picture of the state's sapped water supplies as it endures a third year of severe drought. April storms that brought welcome rain and snow did little to alter that trajectory and were not nearly enough to overcome a record dry start to the year.</p> <p>Despite erratic bursts of precipitation since October, snowpack on April 1 was the fifth-lowest on record since 1950, state climatologist Michael Anderson said. It sits at just 22 percent of average as of May 10.</p> <p>"We used to get these monster snowpacks above 200 percent of average — the last one was in 1983," Anderson said Tuesday. "Since then, they haven't made an appearance."</p> <p>While the reality of the drought — and climate change — may be apparent in parched reservoirs and disappearing mountain snow, that hasn't quelled the demand for water. Gov. Gavin Newsom (D) called on Californians to voluntarily reduce water use by 15 percent last summer, but it declined by only 3.7 percent</p>

from July through March compared with the same period in 2020, according to the State Water Resources Control Board.

It remains to be seen how well the state can conserve existing supplies through the long, hot summer months ahead.

Major reservoirs depleted

Snowpack and snowmelt peaked [early this year](#), and the wet season is drawing to a close.

According to the latest water supply [forecast](#) from the Department of Water Resources, runoff in the state's watersheds is well below average, signaling that reservoirs won't get much of a boost from further snow melt.

"This is what we have; this is what we're going to get — we can't expect anything significant past this date," said Jeanine Jones, interstate water resources manager for the department.

Lake Oroville, the backbone of the State Water Project, which supplies water to farms, homes and businesses statewide, is only 55 percent full. Shasta Lake, the state's largest reservoir, is only 40 percent full and is approaching record-low levels for the time of year, while the nearby Trinity Lake is at only 31 percent of its total capacity.

The Colorado River is an important water source for Southern California, but it is depleted by a climate-change-intensified megadrought — [the worst in 1,200 years](#) — as is much of the West. California has senior water rights on the river and has conserved and "banked" water in Lake Mead for future use.

But supply from the massive Colorado River reservoirs isn't guaranteed in the era of climate change.

"This has been the mainstay in terms of reliability for California during droughts," Jones said. "When we're looking forward ... we see an increased risk of a first-ever shortage to California because of the conditions in the Colorado River Basin."

"This is really an indication that Mother Nature is reminding us that we are in a world of climate change, it's here, and we need to start adapting to it," she said.

Meeting water demands

Relentless heat is already driving the West toward more intense drought by pulling moisture from the land surface via evaporation — drawing down water supplies and increasing wildfire risks. A recent [study](#) found widespread increases in atmospheric thirst driven mostly by rising temperatures due to human-caused climate change.

"These higher evaporative demands mean that, for every drop of precipitation that falls, less water is likely to drain into streams, wetlands, and aquifers across the region," the study notes.

Farms and cities also use more water during hot weather. Marielle Rhodeiro, a research data specialist with the California Water Resources Control Board, reported Tuesday that urban water use rose by nearly 19 percent in March 2022 compared with March 2020, partly because of warmer and drier conditions this year.

A [report](#) by the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) found that high temperatures in 2021, which were nearly 3.5 degrees Fahrenheit above average, resulted in an 8 percent increase in crop water demands.

"We are seeing increased evaporative demand that is making our region thirstier, and we're having less water available because of that," said Alvar Escriva-Bou, a senior fellow at PPIC's Water Policy Center. "We are not yet considering this in planning and management, so this is something that we need to account for."

	<p>On April 26, the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California announced unprecedented restrictions for 6 million customers who rely on water delivered from Northern California via the State Water Project. The move requires households to limit outdoor watering to one day per week starting June 1; a full ban on watering could be imposed by September if the region fails to adequately reduce its water use.</p> <p>“This is a crisis unlike anything that we’ve seen before,” Deven Upadhyay, chief operating officer for the district, said when the restrictions were announced. “We really only have a little more than half of the water that we need to be able to make it through the summertime and into the end of the year under normal demands.”</p> <p>Escriva-Bou said two-year droughts are relatively normal in California, but 2020 and 2021 were exceptionally hot and dry — a difficult lead-in for 2022.</p> <p>“The situation this year is going to be much worse than last year,” he said. “The cumulative impact of a third year of drought makes it much more difficult to manage.”</p>
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HEADLINE	05/11 Russia’s notorious Wagner group
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/xqdbpa/inside-russia-wagner-group-mercenaries
GIST	<p>BERENGO, Central African Republic – VICE World News has gained unprecedented access to Russian leaders overseeing one of the world’s most secretive and brutal mercenary groups – Wagner.</p> <p>Technically Wagner doesn’t even exist – under Russian law it’s illegal to be a mercenary – so instead it operates as a network of companies, spreading Russian influence globally by serving in proxy wars in Syria and Libya.</p> <p>Wagner has had most success in the Central African Republic, where its trainers – mostly formerly of the Russian army – work with a notorious private military company that has close ties to Vladimir Putin and his allies. Operatives rarely refer to the group by name, or even acknowledge its existence, referring instead to “the orchestra.”</p> <p>Vitali Perfilev is the head of the Russian contractors in the Central African Republic, and a top security adviser to the president, where they seized on the national military’s chaotic, losing battle against rebel groups to cement Wagner’s position as invaluable on the battlefield, and as advisers to the government.</p> <p>“Wagner is a myth that was invented by the journalists. But we really don’t care how you call us. You may call us Wagner, Mozart, Schubert, Chopin, Stravinsky. It doesn’t change the meaning, we are still Russian instructors, with the aim of helping countries in need,” Perfilev said.</p> <p>Western intelligence officials and analysts believe Russian leaders overseeing this overall coalition of mercenaries have sent 8,000 of their fighters to back up the floundering Russian army in Ukraine.</p> <p>Unsurprisingly, these Russian leaders paint a vastly different picture of how the war in Ukraine is shaping Wagner’s operations globally.</p> <p>“Among our employees, many are impatient for Donbas, they say that it is their mission, but we keep personnel here to solve the tasks facing [the mission],” Alexandre Ivanov, the General Director of the Officer’s Union for International Security (COSI), the organisation that claims to be responsible for Russia’s private contractors in the Central African Republic, told VICE World News in a rare phone interview.</p>

“All Russian companies working in the field of security in Africa continue to operate,” Ivanov added. “We have missions in the Central African Republic, and other companies have contractual obligations vis-à-vis other countries.”

Wagner’s opaque operations internationally and lack of transparency, coupled with muddled payment structures, has led to confusion about its involvement in Ukraine in the early days of the war and how that might be impacting expansionist goals across Africa, where Wagner has in recent years come to the aid of governments floundering against insurgencies and rebel groups, while leaving a trail of gross human rights violations in its wake.

But nearly two months into Russia’s operations in Ukraine, US and UK intelligence officials are confident in Wagner’s presence there. Russian leaders overseeing the group’s operations across Africa however deny reports that they are drawing down troop presence in key missions in the Central African Republic and Mali in order to fill the gap in Ukraine.

Last month, a UK Ministry of Defence spokesperson told VICE World News that “due to heavy losses and a largely stalled invasion, Russia has highly likely been forced to reprioritise Wagner personnel for Ukraine at the expense of operations in Africa and Syria.”

In response, Ivanov told VICE World News that US and British intelligence should not “spread false information.” But he acknowledged that many of the men serving in Africa are itching to serve their country in Ukraine.

Social media reports have identified suspected Wagner mercenaries who have previously served in well-known missions including in Syria and Libya, reportedly killed or captured in Ukraine. Ivanov cautioned that although alumni of the group could now be serving in Ukraine, they would be working with the Russian military.

Ivanov confirmed to VICE World News that Russian fighters have left Syria — but, he added, not necessarily for Ukraine. “Many of those who worked on various tasks in Syria have now left...for a large project, in one of the [African] countries which have a successful experience of cooperation with Russia.” Ivanov declined to provide further details, reiterating that Russian contractors are in high demand across Africa.

But in a recent meeting with the UK’s Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee, Christo Grozev, the Executive Director of Bellingcat, a collective of open source researchers, said that Wagner sources “actually validated to us a striking number of participation by Wagner in the war at the moment, which is close to 8,000, much higher than expected.”

Grozev described a strikingly high casualty rate among the group, adding that approximately 3,000 out of the 8,000 have reportedly been killed. He described a first wave of Wagner contractors that were dispatched in the direction of Kyiv to scout and target political figures for assassination, which is in line with early reporting that Wagner contractors with intelligence backgrounds were part of a hit squad tasked with taking out President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

On the 17th of April, photos of one of the group’s main backers [in Ukraine](#), Yevgeny Prigozhin, [surfaced on social media](#). The photo shows him standing in front of a car with Ukrainian plates and alongside well known Kremlin loyalist Vitaly Milonov, leading to reports that Prigozhin is personally in Donbass to oversee the group’s operations in eastern Ukraine.

Dr Sean Mcfate, a Senior Fellow at Atlantic Council and a former private military contractor described Wagner’s role in Ukraine as threefold: “Fifth column operations, execute a kill or capture list for Ukrainian political and military leadership, and intimidate the populace through human rights violations.”

The latter two roles are consistent with the bulk of Wagner’s operations in Africa, where the group routinely carries out extrajudicial kill or capture operations on behalf of governments, against suspected

rebels and jihadists, and exerts control over the civilian population by terrorising civilians in the name of securing the country.

The possible exaggeration of their presence is in line with the strategy of Wagner in Africa and the Middle East, where overstating their role and lethality helps to sow terror and play into an image of fearsome warriors.

A source in Mali's defence ministry, who requested anonymity out of concern for his safety, denied any movement of troops out of Mali in recent months. Instead, he highlighted a delivery of "new equipment, including helicopters" in March and added that several Russian contractors were evacuated from a base in Mopti to the capital Bamako for medical treatment for "serious injury" in March, suggesting Russian troops' involvement in armed conflict in central Mali.

Human rights defenders told VICE World News that the brutality of Wagner contractors' participation in a village raid in central Mali in March sent a message to the local population.

"The sheer terror recounted by the survivors, many of whom hailed from surrounding villages, was palpable and will no doubt reverberate widely within their communities and beyond," Corinne Dufka, West Africa director for Human Rights Watch said.

In the Central African Republic, the leader of a human rights organisation in the capital told VICE World News about generalised "panic of the civilian population toward the CAR armed forces and its Russian allies," particularly noting the "assassination of political leaders and civilian in and around town...these are crimes committed by forces meant to secure the nation."

But Russian operations in Africa continue to expand and observers on the ground as well as Russian contractors themselves said that the so-called "special operation" in Ukraine has changed little on the ground in sub-Saharan Africa.

According to the US military, there are 3,000-5,000 Wagner operatives across the African continent. Independent researchers say the number deployed could be higher than 10,000.

The Central African Republic is their most robust and entrenched mission, where contractors said there are nearly 2,000 of them operating, alongside several hundred legitimate Russian military trainers who were sent to the country in 2018 under an agreement between the Central African and Russian government.

In December, Wagner operatives arrived in Mali, to assist the military junta leading the country in combating rising extremism. In February, the US military confirmed the presence of Wagner in Mali.

"We have observed the Malian junta bring Russian mercenaries into their country. They invited them. They continue to deny this in public but my information is pretty clear, they have brought in Wagner," US Army General Stephen J. Townsend, the Commander of US Africa Command, told reporters in an early February press briefing.

In what has been possibly their most efficient – and lethal – ramp up of operations in Africa so far, Human Rights Watch reported that Russian mercenaries led Malian troops in a massacre of up to 300 civilians in central Mali in a days-long assault on a village inhabited by jihadists. Local sources and researchers told VICE World News that the ratio of Russian trainers to national troops in the massacre, which also targeted extremists, was three to one, suggesting a significant number of Russian troops fighting on the ground in Mali.

Reports of hurried assassinations, psychological torture, and burying civilians in mass graves in the Moura attack are again strikingly similar to patterns of attacks on civilian villages in the Central African Republic by Russian forces and their national allies.

	<p>In a region that has been wracked by violence and extrajudicial attacks on civilians in the name of stemming terror, this attack, led by Russian contractors, stood out.</p> <p>“Armed Islamists have terrorised communities, and over the years killed thousands of villagers in the Sahel,” Human Rights Watch’s Dufka said. “But the Moura allegation incident stands out as the single worst atrocity by any group that we have documented. Worryingly and curiously, it implicates the Malian army and foreign soldiers, who witnesses identified as Russian.”</p> <p>VICE World News spoke to leaders of Russian contractors serving on the ground in the Central African Republic, who reiterated Ivanov’s commitment to the missions in Africa and said that any movement out of the country is simply normal troop rotation. Sources at the airport in the capital Bangui said there have not been significant movement of Russian contractors out of Bangui in recent months.</p> <p>And in CAR’s cities with heavy Russian presence, residents said activities of Russian contractors and their national military trainees have continued, seemingly as normal.</p> <p>Ivanov insisted Russia’s focus on African expansion will remain</p> <p>“The demand for help from Russia is now incredibly high, regularly requests for cooperation arrive from different parts of the continent. So we need instructors in Africa,” he said.</p> <p>Ivanov insists that in the Central African Republic, “there is still much work to be done” but perhaps in a nod to the reported presence of current or former Wagner contractors rushing off to Ukraine, he added: “I wish success to those who work in Mali or in other African countries, as well as the Russian army, the armies of the Luhansk People’s Republic and the Donetsk People’s Republic and the volunteers in the Donbass and in Ukraine.”</p>
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HEADLINE	05/11 Spokane businesses target homelessness
SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/money/economy/boomtown-inland-northwest/spokane-homelessness-boomtown/293-a7f15436-8342-4197-b428-be519b5aa48c
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. — A new group of Spokane business leaders is trying to become part of the solution to homelessness in the city.</p> <p>Members of the group ‘Hello For Good’ held their first symposium on Monday at the Davenport Grand Hotel to hear from San Diego city leaders.</p> <p>Three guest speakers from San Diego spoke about their city’s approach to homelessness and offered insight on what Spokane can do to address the growing issue.</p> <p>Katy Bruya, co-chair of Hello For Good, said there is currently a lot of frustration among business owners in downtown Spokane.</p> <p>"It feels like [Spokane] is not allowing for individuals to be given an opportunity to get off of the street and into shelters through the sit/lie ordinance issues," Bruya said. "We're hearing frustration from other business owners that the problem doesn't seem to be getting better, but seems to be worsening."</p> <p>Rick Gentry, the former CEO of the San Diego Housing Commission, said he believes Spokane can learn from some of San Diego’s past successes.</p> <p>"I think the community of Spokane identifying homelessness as a problem before it gets out of hand, targeting resources and programs and opportunities, and then dealing with it in a responsible fashion will help this community in the long run, rather than just looking the other way," Gentry said.</p>

Gentry said Spokane and San Diego can also learn a lot from each other, adding that it is healthy for a community to look to others. He also believes there should be consistent accountability between city officials, business leaders, and residents.

"Not just those who are on the streets, but also those sitting in the safety of their own homes watching this on TV, [they] say, 'Well, that's not my problem,' or 'Somebody should do something about that,'" Gentry said.

"There's accountability all around. It's really challenging work. There's nothing perfect about there's no perfect answers or silver bullet, but just with kind of a bulldog persistent approach, results can happen," Lucky Duck Foundation Executive Director Drew Moser echoed.

The Lucky Duck Foundation is a non-profit organization, focused on alleviating homelessness in San Diego, through high-impact programs like bridge shelters.

But both Moser and Gentry agree that for any solution to work, communities have to work together.

"What doesn't work is a lack of attention. What doesn't work is pointing a finger and blaming somebody else for it," Gentry said. "What does work, in my opinion, is the whole community coming together, public sector and private sector, ordinary citizens as well, in saying that this is a community problem, we've all got a stake in it, we all need to solve it."

According to Moser, many people believe simply adding more housing is the answer to the nation's homelessness crisis. But he said his work with the Lucky Duck Foundation has proven there also need to be more short-term, immediate pathways to get those experiencing homelessness off the streets.

"You can't get tunnel vision on just the long-term solution," Moser added.

One of the most persistent issues Spokane faces is shelter resistance from within the homeless population. Moser says, "There has to be that balance of right level of outreach coupled with enforcement that creates the carrot stick and, and the right level of accountability to move people off the streets."

During Monday's symposium, former San Diego Mayor Kevin Faulkner was asked what he would have done differently in terms of addressing homelessness. Faulkner told the group that he would have started the process sooner.

That's why Bruya says she's eager to get started with the newly-formed group 'Hello For Good,' which first came together in September 2021.

"The immediate short-term need is focusing on making the shelter on East Trent successful," Bruya said. "And I think all of that will definitely happen because there's enough people involved who really want to make it right. We don't want downtown to become a Seattle or Portland, where we're actually seeing people leave those cities because they just can't take it anymore. We are at this tipping point, and now is the time to really make sure we go down the right path."

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To learn more about 'Hello For Good' and their goals for addressing homelessness in Spokane, [visit their website](#).

HEADLINE	05/11 Massive backlog of appeals from ESD
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/massive-backlog-of-appeals-from-employment-security-department-affecting-about-22-thousand-people
GIST	WASHINGTON - After historic jobless claims in Washington State during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Washington State Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH) is now working on a massive backlog of appeals from the Employment Security Department (ESD).

As of May 6, there are [43,496 total open appeals at OAH](#), affecting about 22,000 people according to Brendon Tukey, the Division Chief Administrative Law Judge for Unemployment Insurance Appeals at OAH.

On average, unemployment appeals are taking about six months to be reviewed, transferred from ESD to OAH, and a hearing scheduled for a decision to be issued.

The [appeals are filed by individuals who have been denied unemployment benefits or were given notices of overpayment](#) from ESD.

"Once the pandemic got rolling, we saw doubling, tripling or even more of our monthly intake and it really built up," said Tukey. "Just a massive increase in the number of Washingtonians who were coming before us with unemployment insurance appeals."

To put the volume to perspective, Tukey said in all of 2019 there were roughly 29,000 appeals from ESD compared to 2021 when it soared to 89,000 appeals in the same time period.

"We've had to increase workloads and be creative about all of our processes in our office to streamline them as much as possible," said Tukey. "Thankfully, in recent weeks, we've seen the intake go down substantially. We picked up about 10,000 new cases that came in March, then in April we had about 5,500 cases come in. We're finally getting to the point where we're closing more appeals in any given month than we're getting. That's going to allow us to start cutting back on that backlog."

As a result, OAH is hiring more administrative law judges and support staff. Before the pandemic, the Office had about 45 administrative law judges and now there are 71.

If you are going through the appeal process, Tukey recommends [visiting the OAH website and signing up for the Participant Portal](#) to review documents that been uploaded for the case. You may also want to upload additional documents to be reviewed as part of your hearing. You can also call OAH at 1-800-583-8271 if you prefer to do this over the phone.

"Once we have a hearing scheduled, we send a notice of hearing in the mail. That's when they'll hear from us that the case is scheduled, when the case is going to be heard, how they can participate and all of that kind of useful information," said Tukey. "The judge will walk them through very carefully, asking them questions, getting their testimony, reviewing all the documents related to their case and then when the hearing has reached an end the judge will give them an opportunity to essentially make a closing argument."

Bethany Singh of Renton is filing for an appeal after receiving an overpayment notice of \$36,391. Singh said she was unable to work because her husband is immunocompromised and she needed to care for him and protect him during the height of the pandemic.

"You know I've never been in debt that much ever in my life," said Singh. "The stress levels, it's intense, and it causes a lot of sleepless nights for me."

Rory O'Sullivan is offering people with significant overpayment notices a free half hour consultation at his firm [Washington Employment Benefits Advocates](#). He was formerly an OAH Administrative Law Judge who heard these cases, then decided to go back to his roots of representing individuals facing challenges navigating unemployment issues and appeals.

"The most important thing is to be checking your ESD account. It's important to read through the documents, even though they're difficult to understand, look at the notices you've received understand how and why it is Employment Security Department has made that decision and then look for help," said O'Sullivan. "They can be confusing and complicated, but try to check it out, try to understand what they're asking for and try to provide any information that they're requesting."

	<p>O’Sullivan said a few good resources include WashingtonLawHelp.org, the Unemployment Law Project or a private practice attorney.</p> <p>"We review all the documents, we interview the client, determine if there are other witnesses that might be called at the hearing, other documents they might want to submit. We go through a whole mock hearing so they’re prepared for the kinds of questions the judge might ask," said O’Sullivan.</p> <p>Some hopeful signs, OAH said the number of new cases coming in has gone down substantially in recent weeks giving the Office a chance to cut back on the massive backlog.</p> <p>ESD also passed an emergency rule that allows a new way of resolving cases called Brief Adjudicative Procedure (BAP). Cases are heard based on a written sworn statement instead of a traditional hearing where a person calls in.</p> <p>"It’s a pilot program right now. We have five judges who are working on this program and we select simple cases that are of a type that lend themselves to being resolved on paper people can simply fill out a form," said Tukey.</p> <p>Tukey said it’s saving everyone time and allows judges to handle a high volume of cases.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/11 China warns ASEAN over US influence
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/may/11/china-bristles-bidens-asean-summit-wary-power-stru/
GIST	<p>President Biden’s summit with Southeast Asian leaders begins Thursday, and China is warning participating nations that American attempts to exert influence over the region could stoke confrontation.</p> <p>Administration officials say Mr. Biden will toe a cautious rhetorical line on issues pertaining to China during the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) gathering at the White House. The long-standing Asian diplomatic group has been increasingly caught up in the rivalry for influence between Washington and Beijing. Mr. Biden, who has put democracy promotion at the center of his foreign policy, will also host several ASEAN nation leaders with less-than-stellar records on human rights and civil liberties.</p> <p>“He does not want to send Southeast Asia or Asia into a new cold war,” White House Indo-Pacific coordinator Kurt Campbell said Wednesday as most of the top leaders from ASEAN members were en route to Washington for the two-day summit, which begins with a White House dinner Thursday evening. The official members of the Southeast Asian alliance are Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.</p> <p>Mr. Campbell’s remark, at a virtual event hosted by the U.S. Institute of Peace, appeared to be a response to Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi’s public comments this week that Asian countries should “guard against” efforts by outside powers to “bring a cold war mentality into this region and incite confrontations between camps.”</p> <p>Mr. Wang, according to the South China Morning Post, made the remarks during a video call with Cambodian Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn, whose country currently holds the rotating chairmanship of ASEAN. Neither China nor the U.S. is an official member.</p> <p>Although Mr. Wang did not explicitly single out Mr. Biden or the U.S., he emphasized that Cambodia and other ASEAN members should take possession of the “Asian moment” in Washington and at other major diplomatic gatherings in the region this year.</p>

The guarded rhetoric underscores the high stakes of the summit. Analysts say the gathering demonstrates that Mr. Biden perceives the U.S.-ASEAN relationship to be vital to his wider Indo-Pacific strategy, given that he carved out time to host the ASEAN leaders while foreign policy in Washington is consumed by Russia's war in Ukraine.

Mr. Biden is scheduled to visit Asia this month with stops in South Korea and Japan.

President Trump, whose Asia policy focused heavily on bilateral relations with Beijing, did not attend the three final ASEAN annual summits of his term. A U.S.-ASEAN summit in Las Vegas in 2020 was called off because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

On the agenda this week are regional trade relations and security issues, most notably China's increasingly aggressive military muscle-flexing in Southeast Asian waters. The Ukraine crisis also is looming large, but it remains to be seen whether Mr. Biden will seek ASEAN's help to formally broaden the coalition of nations standing against and imposing sanctions on Moscow.

Analysts say the Ukraine developments give the president a chance to drive a wedge between ASEAN and China, which has vast trade dealings with every one of the group's members but has been widely criticized for its apparent support of Russia's actions.

The stakes are high for Beijing as well. ASEAN as a bloc represents China's largest trade partner, accounting for 14.6% of its total foreign trade in the first four months of this year, more than either the U.S. or the European Union.

"China has put itself in a very awkward and unhelpful spot vis-a-vis ASEAN and the rest of the world regarding its waffling responses to Russia's invasion of Ukraine after also signing a 'no limits' friendship deal with Russia in March," said Satu Limaye, who heads the Washington office of the East-West Center and the Asia Matters for America initiative.

Mr. Limaye pointed in an interview to complex regional dynamics tied to the Chinese-Russian relationship. He said nearly all of the ASEAN countries have expressed discontent with Russia's invasion of Ukraine despite geopolitical risks.

"Even Cambodia has come out and criticized Russia's actions in Ukraine," he said. "The only country in Southeast Asia that has been straddling neutrality on the Russian invasion has been Vietnam, and that's because, like India, Vietnam depends on Russian armaments to defend itself against the threat posed by China."

Myanmar's military-run government is the lone ASEAN nation expressing outright support for Russia's invasion. Myanmar is in a diplomatic clash with ASEAN. Other member nations have excluded junta leader Min Aung Hlaing, who led a coup against and jailed most of Myanmar's civilian government last year.

High-stakes summit

Regional analysts generally agree that the stakes of ASEAN gatherings cannot be overstated because it represents one of the world's most economically dynamic regions and is trying to decide which camp is its best fit.

"This is a crucial opportunity for the United States to impress Southeast Asian leaders with the benefits of working with Washington. The meeting underscores ASEAN centrality, America's highest-level commitment and a constructive counterweight to China's rules," said Patrick Cronin, the Asia-Pacific security chair at the Hudson Institute.

Mr. Cronin said the Biden administration will be pushing behind the scenes for ASEAN to deliver a collective statement in opposition to China's aggressive moves in the South China Sea. The Chinese

military has built bases on man-made islands in recent years and has claimed sovereignty over disputed island chains.

“The last time Cambodia was the chair of ASEAN, Southeast Asian nations failed to issue a communique reprimanding China for using coercion to alter the South China Sea unilaterally. This time, Washington wants to leave nothing to chance,” he said. “In the run-up to important ASEAN meetings this summer and fall, close U.S. diplomatic engagement with member states is the surest way of averting a repeat of what happened a decade ago. In July 2012, ASEAN foreign ministers failed to issue a communique for the first time in 45 years because Cambodia felt compelled to protect China from regional criticism.”

Reports at the time said Beijing exerted pressure to influence Cambodia, which has no claims to disputed islands in the South China Sea and relies heavily on China for trade and investment.

Mr. Cronin said Mr. Biden has a chance to show ASEAN leaders that “he hears and understands” what they have to say and that “his administration will remain open to them whenever they need to talk.”

“The point,” he said, “is to emphasize that the United States is not looking for a transactional relationship as part of some U.S.-China rivalry; rather, Washington is looking for serious long-term partners in Southeast Asia.”

The White House has projected a similar message. Mr. Campbell said Wednesday that while the Biden administration remains deeply focused on daily developments in Ukraine, he and other top presidential advisers “all recognize that the larger strategic challenges that are going to play out in the Indo-Pacific region.”

“There has been a sense that in previous administrations we had set off with a determined pace to focus on East Asia or the Indo-Pacific and then [found] ourselves with other pressing challenges that perhaps [drew] us away a little bit,” said Mr. Campbell, who was widely credited with pushing the “pivot to Asia” policy mantra as a top Obama administration aide.

“I think there is a deep sense that that can’t happen again,” said Mr. Campbell.

He said Mr. Biden “will be very direct” in his discussions with ASEAN leaders on the issue of U.S. competition with China.

“He will talk about our strategy, he’ll talk about our desire to compete, but compete peacefully and effectively,” Mr. Campbell said.

Any successful strategy, he said, “must be fundamentally based on the needs and the desires of the people of Southeast Asia.”

“We are not naive,” he said. “We understand the nature of competition through Southeast Asia. I think our goal, not just the United States working alone, but increasingly working with partners Japan, Australia, New Zealand [and] countries in Europe, is to demonstrate that ... we’re trying to engage in following transparent practices, advance global practices of good governance, engage appropriately with financial institutions on a range of issues, debt relief ... [and] health and human services.”

The White House last year announced Mr. Biden’s “intent to provide up to \$102 million in new initiatives to expand the U.S.-ASEAN Strategic Partnership.” How that translates into real diplomatic and security progress among ASEAN countries remains to be seen.

“The larger strategic competition is with China, and we need to be mindful that China’s equities and favor in the region are going down on the political-security front, so the United States should continue to make sure that we’re rallying ASEAN countries and fully engaging them so that we are able to have continued influence amongst them,” the East-West Center’s Mr. Limaye said. “President Biden is doing

that. The very fact he's hosting this summit at a moment when there's a land war in the middle of Europe says as much. This is not trivial stuff."

Mr. Limaye added, however, that the U.S. is "failing to compete effectively with China on the economic side of relations with ASEAN countries."

"China is out-trading us with these countries," he said, and the Biden administration could do more to "provide Southeast Asian countries as a whole with the confidence that the U.S. will remain not only as a political-security partner, which there is no doubt about, but also as a vital economic partner."

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HEADLINE	05/11 DIA: intel suggests Covid modified in lab
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/may/11/dia-intel-suggests-covid-virus-was-lab-engineered/
GIST	<p>Army Lt. Gen. Scott Berrier, director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, revealed in prepared Senate testimony this week that some U.S. intelligence agencies — not identified by name — believe the virus behind the COVID-19 pandemic may have been genetically modified in a laboratory and not transmitted naturally from an animal host in China, where it was first identified.</p> <p>Limited and fragmentary information on the virus origin led to multiple theories on the virus origin among the 17 agencies that make up the U.S. intelligence community, he said. Despite the uncertainty, all agencies claim the virus known as SARS-CoV-2 was not developed as a biological weapon.</p> <p>But Gen. Berrier added without elaborating that "most agree that it was not genetically engineered." That suggests more than one intelligence agency has information pointing to the COVID virus still spreading worldwide as containing human-produced genetic modifications.</p> <p>It was the first time a government official disclosed on the record declassified intelligence indicating the coronavirus behind the pandemic could have been manipulated in a laboratory, a charge the Chinese government has fiercely denied.</p> <p>The DIA's National Center for Medical Intelligence is the most forward-leaning within U.S. government circles in asserting the virus came from a Chinese laboratory. The DIA medical unit is said to base its assessment on intelligence related to Chinese military experiments. Other intelligence is based on military activities at the Wuhan Institute of Virology, considered one likely source for the virus outbreak that first emerged in late 2019 in the city of Wuhan.</p> <p>A 2015 book by a group of People's Liberation Army medical specialists and obtained by the State Department alleged that the 2003 outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome was caused by a genetically-modified bat coronavirus known as SARS-CoV. One PLA doctor stated that the virus was weaponized and used to attack China.</p> <p>"It can be seen that the new human virus ecological gene weapon is very close to the natural state, so it is difficult to detect and prevent and control," states a translated portion of the book obtained by Inside the Ring. "It often enters the attacked party in a very 'natural' state, which makes it more difficult to identify."</p> <p>Another sign of possible genetic manipulation of the COVID-19 coronavirus was outlined in a 2013 medical journal article by a group of scientists who included the Wuhan Institute of Virology's director, Shi Zhengli, dubbed the "Bat Woman of Wuhan" for her research.</p> <p>The article in Nature Medicine stated that Ms. Shi and nine others had genetically engineered a "SARS-like" chimeric and hybrid virus from bats. The virus was intended to help research whether such viruses could infect humans.</p> <p>The State Department in January 2021 revealed that the Wuhan Institute of Virology had conducted PLA experiments on animals contrary to Beijing's insistence that the institute did not conduct military research.</p>

“Starting in at least 2016 — and with no indication of a stop prior to the COVID-19 outbreak — WIV researchers conducted experiments involving RaTG13, the bat coronavirus identified by the WIV in January 2020 as its closest sample to SARS-CoV-2 (96.2% similar),” the department said in a fact sheet.

Chinese secrecy surrounding the origin of the virus has prevented international investigators from pinpointing the cause of the pandemic that Gen. Berrier said has killed more than 6.2 million people worldwide.

“China continues to obscure all investigations into the origins of COVID-19 that would assist in making a definitive assessment, preventing the release of information such as data on early cases, access to potential host species, or documents from internal investigations — behavior indicative of a desire to keep COVID origins secret,” Gen. Berrier said.

China’s government had denied the virus began in China and has charged the virus may have leaked from a U.S. Army lab, claims dismissed by U.S. officials as disinformation.

Gen. Berrier said four agencies and the National Intelligence Council “assess with low confidence that the virus likely emerged from a natural interaction between an animal infected with the virus and a human. One [intelligence agency] assesses with moderate confidence a laboratory origin is more likely and three other [agencies] are unable to arrive at either conclusion without additional information.”

Different waves of COVID variants have spread over the past year, and DIA analysts predict additional waves over the next six months.

“The emergence of novel respiratory viruses capable of causing sustained human-to-human transmission on multiple continents, like COVID- 19 and its variants, continues to pose the greatest enduring infectious disease risk to U.S. personnel,” the general testified.

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HEADLINE	05/12 Day 78 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/12/russia-ukraine-war-what-we-know-on-day-78-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Russian-controlled administration in the Ukrainian city of Kherson has said it plans to request annexation by Moscow, a move that would confirm the Kremlin’s permanent occupation of Ukrainian territory captured since February. Kyiv said Moscow plans to hold a fake referendum on independence or annexation. The Kremlin responded that it was up to residents living in region to decide whether they wanted to join Russia, but any decision must have a legal basis.• Russian and Ukrainian forces appear to be settling into a gruelling and deadly stalemate in Ukraine’s east. Despite claims from Ukraine’s president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, that Ukrainian counteroffensives around Kharkiv and elsewhere were pushing invading Russian forces back, Ukrainian successes appeared to be confined for now to the far north-eastern and south-western flanks of the 300-mile frontline.• Ukraine claimed it has recaptured Pytomnyk, a village north of Kharkiv, about halfway to the Russian border. “The occupying forces moved to the defence in order to slow down the pace of the offensive of our troops,” Ukraine’s general staff of the armed forces said in its latest report. “The settlement of Pytomnyk ... was liberated.”• Boris Johnson has promised to support Sweden and Finland against potential Russian threats in any way necessary. The UK prime minister travelled to both countries to sign mutual security agreements, with their governments mulling Nato membership in the wake of the Ukraine invasion. Finland’s president, Sauli Niinistö, said joining would be to “maximise security” and not be in any way offensive.• Ukraine has said it will suspend the flow of gas through a transit point that it says delivers almost a third of the fuel piped from Russia to Europe through Ukraine. GTSOU, which operates Ukraine’s gas system, said it would stop shipments via the Sokhranivka route from Wednesday, declaring “force majeure”, a clause invoked when a business is hit by something

	<p>beyond its control. Gas flows from Russia's Gazprom to Europe via Ukraine fell by a quarter on Wednesday.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zelenskiy warned Kyiv was running out of patience to hold talks with Russia, given the mounting evidence of atrocities committed by Russian forces in his country. He said the possibility to negotiate "disappears" with "each new Bucha, each new Mariupol". • The war will end when Ukraine reclaims everything that Russia took from it, Zelenskiy maintained. "The war will end for the Ukrainian people only when we get back what's ours," he said in an online address with students of leading universities in France, representatives of academia and the media. • Three Russian prisoners of war accused of targeting or murdering civilians, and a soldier who allegedly killed a man before raping his wife, are set to be in the dock in the first war crimes trials of the Ukraine conflict, the Ukrainian prosecutor general has revealed. More than 10,700 crimes have been registered since the war began by the office of Ukraine's prosecutor general, led by Iryna Venediktova, and a handful of cases have now been filed or are ready to be submitted. • Ukraine has proposed to Russia that badly injured defenders in the Azovstal steel plant in the southern port of Mariupol be swapped for Russian prisoners of war, deputy prime minister Iryna Vereshchuk said on Wednesday. "There is no agreement yet. Negotiations are continuing," she said in a post on Telegram. • Russia has demanded a formal apology from Poland and threatened possible future reprisals after its ambassador was doused with red paint at the Soviet military cemetery in Warsaw on Monday. The statement by Russia's foreign ministry came after it summoned the Polish ambassador, Krzysztof Krajewski, to receive its protest. • A Chinese former ambassador to Ukraine, Gao Yusheng, has strongly criticised Russia's invasion. In a speech which was reported on by the Chinese press before quickly being taken down. Gao said Putin's frequent "violations" of former Soviet states' territory were "the greatest threat to peace, security and stability in Eurasia". • The wives of two of the last remaining Ukrainian fighters holed up in Mariupol's steelworks asked Pope Francis to help get soldiers to a third country. One told him: "You are our last hope, I hope you can save their lives. Please don't let them die."
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HEADLINE	05/11 Ukraine Kherson seeks Russia annexation
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/11/kherson-military-administrators-to-call-for-russian-annexation-ukraine
GIST	<p>The Russian-controlled administration in the Ukrainian city of Kherson has said it plans to request annexation by Moscow, a move that would confirm the Kremlin's permanent occupation of Ukrainian territory captured since February.</p> <p>If Russia attempts to annex the Kherson region it would make a peace agreement more unlikely, as Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, has said that Russia's withdrawal to prewar positions was a precondition for any successful negotiation.</p> <p>It is not clear whether the Kremlin will go forward with an annexation or is using it as a threat to put pressure on Kyiv.</p> <p>The annexation call was made on Wednesday by Kirill Stremousov, the deputy head of the military administration Russia put in place to run Kherson in late April. Russia occupied Kherson in March and seized its city council building in late April.</p> <p>"The city of Kherson is Russia; there will be no the KNR [Kherson People's Republic] on the territory of the Kherson region, there will be no referendums," said Stremousov in a televised briefing. "It will be a single decree based on the appeal of the leadership of the Kherson region to the president of the Russian Federation, and there will be a request to make [Kherson] into a full-fledged region of the Russian Federation."</p>

Stremousov previously said that Kherson would begin using the rouble currency, a move seen as creeping integration into Russia.

Russian officials who have visited Kherson have promised not to abandon the region. “Russia is here to stay forever,” said Andrei Turchak, secretary general of Russia’s ruling United Russia party, while visiting Kherson last week. “There should be no doubt about it. There will be no return to the past.”

But similar requests for annexation from territories such as the Russian-controlled Donetsk People’s Republic have languished for years, as the Kremlin has dangled integration while seeking to put pressure on Kyiv.

Putin began his new war in Ukraine by announcing the independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics, territories with local administrations also controlled by Russia.

While there have been rumours they could hold new referendums to demand accession into Russia, that has not yet taken place. Local leaders say their model outcome is that of Crimea, the peninsula annexed by Russia in 2014 after a referendum under a puppet government. But few Russians have a similar attachment to the Kherson, Donetsk, or Luhansk regions, or want to see them as part of the Russian Federation.

Turchak gave a careful answer when asked if Kherson would become part of Russia: “Let’s not get ahead of ourselves. In any case, the status will be determined by the residents,” he said.

That view was echoed by the Kremlin on Wednesday, with its spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, saying any appeal should be “decided by the residents of the Kherson region ... and residents of the Kherson region should also determine their fate”. He also said the decision would have to be vetted by lawyers and legal experts to be “absolutely legitimate, as it was with Crimea”.

Analysts have said that the call for annexation without a referendum indicated the weakness of the Russian position in those regions. Russia “doesn’t feel stable on occupied areas, they can’t afford even fake referendum as in 2014. No local support at all,” wrote Maria Zolkina, a political analyst at Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation, a Kyiv-based thinktank.

Ukrainian officials, meanwhile, vowed that the Kherson region would be recaptured before any annexation could take place. “The invaders may ask to join even Mars or Jupiter. The Ukrainian army will liberate Kherson, no matter what games with words they play,” said Mykhailo Podolyak, a Ukrainian presidential adviser.

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HEADLINE	05/11 Study: effects of long Covid
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/11/covid-hospitalised-long-symptomatic-two-years-on-wuhan-study
GIST	<p>More than half of people hospitalised with Covid-19 still have at least one symptom two years after they were first infected, according to the longest follow-up study of its kind.</p> <p>While physical and mental health generally improve over time, the analysis suggests that coronavirus patients discharged from hospital still tend to experience poorer health and quality of life than the general population. The research was published in the Lancet Respiratory Medicine.</p> <p>“Our findings indicate that for a certain proportion of hospitalised Covid-19 survivors, while they may have cleared the initial infection, more than two years is needed to recover fully,” said the lead author, Prof Bin Cao, of the China-Japan Friendship hospital in China.</p> <p>Until now, the long-term health effects of Covid-19 have remained largely unknown, as the longest follow-up studies to date have spanned about a year. The absence of pre-Covid-19 health status data and</p>

comparisons with the general population in most studies also made it difficult to determine how well patients with Covid-19 have recovered.

For the new study, researchers sought to analyse the long-term health outcomes of hospitalised Covid-19 survivors, as well as specific health impacts of long Covid. They evaluated the health of 1,192 participants with acute Covid-19 treated at Jin Yin-tan Hospital in Wuhan, China, between 7 January and 29 May 2020, at six months, 12 months and two years. The average age was 57 at discharge.

Assessments involved a six-minute walking test, laboratory tests, and questionnaires on symptoms, mental health, health-related quality of life, whether they had returned to work and healthcare use after discharge. Health outcomes at two years were determined using an age, sex and comorbidities-matched control group of people in the general population with no history of Covid-19 infection.

Six months after initially falling ill, 68% of the patients reported at least one long Covid symptom. Two years after infection, more than half – 55% – still reported symptoms. Fatigue or muscle weakness were those most often reported. Regardless of the severity of their initial illness, two years later, one in 10 patients – 11% – had not returned to work.

Two years after initially falling ill, the patients were in poorer health than the general population, with 31% reporting fatigue or muscle weakness and 31% reporting sleep difficulties. The proportion of non-Covid-19 participants reporting these symptoms was 5% and 14% respectively. The Covid-19 patients were also more likely to report a number of other symptoms including joint pain, palpitations, dizziness and headaches. In quality of life questionnaires, Covid-19 survivors also more often reported pain or discomfort and anxiety or depression than non-Covid-19 participants.

The authors acknowledged limitations to their study. Being a single-centre study from early in the pandemic, the findings may not directly extend to the long-term health outcomes of patients infected with subsequent variants, the Lancet Respiratory Medicine said. Like most Covid-19 follow-up studies, there is also the potential for information bias when analysing self-reported health outcomes.

“Ongoing follow-up of Covid-19 survivors, particularly those with symptoms of long Covid, is essential to understand the longer course of the illness, as is further exploration of the benefits of rehabilitation programmes for recovery,” said Cao. “There is a clear need to provide continued support to a significant proportion of people who’ve had Covid-19, and to understand how vaccines, emerging treatments and variants affect long-term health outcomes.”

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HEADLINE	05/11 Canada right to die: suicide by poverty?
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/11/canada-cases-right-to-die-laws
GIST	<p>After pleading unsuccessfully for affordable housing to help ease her chronic health condition, a Canadian woman ended her life in February under the country’s assisted-suicide laws. Another woman, suffering from the same condition and also living on disability payments, has nearly reached final approval to end her life.</p> <p>The two high-profile cases have prompted disbelief and outrage, and shone a light on Canada’s right-to-die laws, which critics argue are being misused to punish the poor and infirm. In late April, the Spectator ran a story with the provocative headline: Why is Canada euthanising the poor?</p> <p>But medical and legal experts caution that oversimplified media coverage of the cases fail to capture the realities of the system – and warn that sensationalist coverage of a handful of “extreme” cases ignores a larger crisis in the country’s healthcare systems.</p> <p>In February, a 51-year-old Ontario woman known as Sophia was granted physician-assisted death after her chronic condition became intolerable and her meagre disability stipend left her little to survive on, according to CTV News.</p>

“The government sees me as expendable trash, a complainer, useless and a pain in the ass,” she said in a video obtained by the network. For two years, she and friends had pleaded without success for better living conditions, she said.

Now a second case has emerged with several parallels: another woman, known as Denise, [has also applied to end her life](#) after being unable to find suitable housing and struggling to survive on disability payments.

Both were diagnosed with multiple chemical sensitivity (MCR), a condition in which common chemicals, such as those in cigarette smoke and laundry detergents, can trigger nausea, blinding headaches and in extreme cases, anaphylactic shock.

Both had also argued that specialized housing – where air flow is more controlled – would ease their debilitating symptoms.

Unable to work, they each received \$1,169 per month – placing them well below the poverty line in Canada’s most populous and expensive province.

For activists, the cases have come to represent Canada’s failure to care for its most vulnerable citizens – and raised questions about how assisted-suicide laws are applied.

But experts caution the cases are also being used by groups opposed to medical assistance in death (Maid) in an attempt to scale back legislation – rather than looking at how governments can improve people living with disabilities.

“Inadequate housing is not one of the eligibility criteria for medical assistance in dying. While somebody’s living circumstances may contribute to their suffering, it does not constitute the grievous and irremediable medical condition, which must exist,” said Chantal Perrot, a physician and Maid provider.

Perrot said that while housing could have helped, it was only a part of a broader struggle against the chronic condition.

“The only treatment really for that is avoidance of all triggers. That’s pretty much impossible to do in ordinary life. So better housing can create a temporary bubble for a person – but there’s no cure for this,” she said. “We do this work because we believe in people’s right to an assisted death. It’s not always easy to do. But we know that patients need it and value it. We live with the challenge of the work, in part because it is important to alleviate that suffering.”

When Canada introduced legislation on assisted suicide in 2016, advocacy groups raised fears that vulnerable populations could be targeted, or that physicians would be forced to override the oaths they’d taken to protect patients.

“Many of the slippery-slope arguments that were made initially never happened,” said Hillary Ferguson, a bioethicist at Dalhousie University. “There were fears that the floodgates would open and all these people would be accessing Maid or even forced upon them. But that’s not been the case.”

Last year, lawmakers revised the criteria for MAID after the country’s supreme court ruled that a previous version of the law, which excluded people with disabilities, was unconstitutional.

The issue is once again before a special joint parliamentary committee tasked with deciding whether to expand access to consenting children and those with mental illness.

Jocelyn Downie, a professor of law at Dalhousie and expert in end-of-life policy, said there are extensive guardrails in the system to protect Canadians.

	<p>“You have to meet rigorous eligibility criteria. And being poor and not having a home, or a home that is suitable for you, does not make you eligible,” said Downie. Cases that involve a chronic condition are often time-consuming because clinicians are working to exhaust all other options to ease the suffering of their patients, she said.</p> <p>Downie said that the cases do highlight societal failures – but not with the country’s assisted dying laws.</p> <p>“Listen to what people living with disabilities have been asking for years,” she said, pointing to investments in accessible housing and transportation.</p> <p>Instead of fighting over the law, which lawmakers are unlikely to repeal given a string of supreme court cases upholding the right to physician assisted death, Downie said a greater emphasis should be on disability supports and services and mental health supports.</p> <p>“The reality is, it’s a small number of people who qualify for Maid. But investments in mental health and disability resources would go so far to help so many more people live their lives.”</p>
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HEADLINE	05/11 Light rail: riders using drugs, passing out
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/public-transit-video-shows-nearly-20-people-passed-out-link-light-rail-train/L5WS3VSZ3RABFACN4UXKBXBDFQ/
GIST	<p>KING COUNTY, Wash. — KIRO 7 has obtained video showing more than a dozen riders who appeared to be unconscious on a Sound Transit Link light rail train.</p> <p>Train operators told KIRO 7’s Gary Horcher they are seeing riders using drugs and passing out on a daily basis.</p> <p>KIRO 7 was told that the biggest problem they’re facing is those who smoke fentanyl, resulting in fumes in the train’s cab, as well as those who don’t pay the fare.</p> <p>It is the same issue a KIRO 7 investigation uncovered on the King County Metro bus system.</p> <p>The video that was sent to KIRO 7 was recorded early in the morning on May 2, at the Angle Lake station.</p> <p>The link operators said they had stopped the train and riders were supposed to exit so the train could return and go northbound but security was not present to make sure those riders got off.</p> <p>That video showed 18 people who appeared to be unconscious and slumped over or sprawled out on the train.</p> <p>The train operator even pointed out that one rider appeared he might urinate as he saw the camera.</p> <p>KIRO 7 was told that the air on the trains is heated or cooled and recirculated, so anything that is smoked in the cars is carried to the cab where the operator controls the train.</p> <p>The operator said it happens frequently, especially early in the morning or late at night.</p> <p>KIRO 7 reached out to Sound Transit about the video and the transit agency sent this statement that reads in part:</p> <p>“The severity of the problem displayed in the video is particularly concerning and is new information to us. The riders in this case apparently boarded the train early in the morning. At the end of the line, our security vendor is supposed to walk through that train and ask all riders to exit. This interaction also serves as a check on the rider’s welfare, to ensure that the riders are responsive. The security vendor failed to</p>

	<p>perform this duty in this case. Due to many reasons, including situations like this, we were already in the process of recompeting the security contract.”</p> <p>The agency also said for the majority of riders, Link is safe and reliable. Sound Transit said since the pandemic, they are definitely seeing an up-tick in issues related to sanitation, safety and to security, especially early morning and late at night.</p> <p>The transit agency is launching new pilot programs to address the problems, including a new Sound Transit Outreach Team.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/11 ORCA bus, ferry cards get weekend refresh
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/orca-bus-ferry-cards-get-refresh-fare-free-weekend/UE4S2MGUWFBEPK7ZKNWMBRBE/
GIST	<p>ORCA, the pass system that transit riders use to pay fares on buses and ferries around Puget Sound, is getting a refresh.</p> <p>The new system will launch on Monday, with a new website and smartphone app, and as part of the transition, transit agencies in the region won’t collect fares over the weekend, according to an announcement from transit officials.</p> <p>The fare-free weekend runs from 3 a.m. Saturday to 2:29 a.m. Monday, the Kitsap Sun reported.</p> <p>Current card holders won’t lose any funds that have been loaded into their accounts during the transition and won’t need to get a new card. But they will want to register their card under a new account at myORCA.com starting on Monday. Existing autoloading configurations will expire, so users will need to set those links up again.</p> <p>New, black ORCA cards will become available, but the blue cards transit riders have currently will continue to work under the new system.</p> <p>ORCA, which stands for “One Regional Card for All,” can be used on transit throughout the region, including Washington State Ferries, King County Metro and other systems. There are more than 5 million ORCA customer accounts regionwide.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/11 Stores tackle staff shortages, tourists return
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/seattle-restaurantsstores-tackle-staffing-shortages-covid-sick-calls-as-tourists-return
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Seattle, being a big tourist destination, has been counting on cruises and big crowds to help its economy recover from the pandemic.</p> <p>But the increasing COVID cases in King County, coupled with ongoing staffing shortages, make it doubly challenging for many tourism-related businesses.</p> <p>New numbers in King County show a nine percent increase in daily case numbers, with an average of 1,006 cases per day.</p> <p>On the other hand, hospitalizations are down six percent.</p> <p>For reference a month ago, King County was averaging 514 cases a day.</p> <p>The highest daily case numbers were reported in January with 6,250 cases reported a day.</p>

Because of staffing shortages and sick calls, some Seattle businesses say they are shifting between locations. Some employees are working double shifts. Others are working longer shifts.

Meanwhile, tourists are returning to many of Seattle restaurants, stores, and hotels.

At the Crab Pot Restaurant on Pier 57, it's all hands on deck in the kitchen.

After an economic slowdown during the pandemic, tourists are returning to the Seattle Waterfront and its many businesses.

"We do look to the cruise ships as giving us a little boost when they're in," said Hal Griffith, the owner of Pier 57.

"We are just so excited to welcome back everybody," said Kari Hicks with Seattle Shirt Company on Pier 55. "I think it's going to be an amazing summer. Everyone is so excited to seeing new life in the city!"

However, staffing shortages continue across many industries.

"It's still really difficult right now--which is really frustrating," said Hicks.

She said Seattle Shirt Company hopes to hire 20 more employees for its three Seattle store locations by summer to help with tourism demand.

Now, there's a new challenge--a growing number of COVID cases in King County.

That means many businesses have to juggle schedules and fewer employees because more workers are calling out sick.

"We do have enough people that we can cover. Or they go to overtime and cover. The biggest problem we have is if we don't have enough people to cover than people are picking up the burden--running double shifts and that sort of thing," said Griffith.

Restaurants are typically the hardest hit.

"All operations are impacted. Probably restaurants are the most vulnerable because we need so many people to operate. And as we get busy, we need every employee we've got," said Griffith.

But retail stores feel the squeeze too. Seattle Shirt Company is hiring for the summer and they are also dealing with more sick calls from COVID.

"We've actually seen a little increase in our staff with COVID that we've never seen before so," said Hicks. "There's more people in town. It's going to happen."

She said many of her employees choose to continue to mask up.

"We deal with the public. And we deal with people who are from different locations who might not be vaccinated fully. So, we are being really careful and we're making do with what we have," said Hicks.

To get by, the business is juggling schedules and employees.

"We're a little worried but we're actually borrowing from other locations. People are getting some overtime, which is great," said Hicks.

KOMO News asked Washington State Hospitality Association about the impact of staffing shortages and COVID sick calls on restaurants.

They shared this statement:

“Restaurants are part of the hardest hit industry in the pandemic, and we know it’s far from over — our average operators have \$160,000 in debt from the past two years. Recent case numbers underscore the importance of passing the Restaurant Revitalization Fund, which is up for a vote in the Senate next week. In the meantime, we continue to provide a safe environment for workers and guests as we have throughout the pandemic. And we continue to ask for the support and patience of the public as we continue to navigate the evolving nature of COVID.”

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HEADLINE	05/11 Costly virtual reality training for SPD?
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/virtual-reality-training-could-come-to-spd-through-fundraiser
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Police in Western Washington and beyond are under renewed scrutiny for how they handle tense situations.</p> <p>But officials with the Seattle Police Department say virtual reality training could help officers learn how to better de-escalate some confrontations even though the gear for the program is pricey, costing half-a-million dollars.</p> <p>Instead of trying to get it added to the police budget, however, there's a new campaign to raise the money through donations.</p> <p>One of the main scenarios in the VR training involves a young man with autism.</p> <p>Police response</p> <p>Seattle Officer Chris Christman points to a real life situation in Buckeye, Ariz., to explain why training is key.</p> <p>Body camera video shows an officer approach a 14-year-old boy named Connor Liebel, who is on the autism spectrum.</p> <p>He is handling a string while doing something known as stimming, a common coping mechanism.</p> <p>The officer asks Liebel what he's doing, and as they talk, Liebel tries to walk away.</p> <p>That's when the officer grabs him and ultimately takes him down to the ground as the teen screams.</p> <p>His aunt arrives later and explains that Liebel has autism. While the encounter ends with a handshake, Liebel suffered scratches, bruises and needed surgery on his ankle. His family filed a lawsuit against the city of Buckeye.</p> <p>Christman uses the video in classroom training on autism.</p> <p>"Heartbreaking doesn't, to me, it doesn't describe it," he said of the video. "I just had this feeling. I need to stop this from happening, like I need to do what I can."</p> <p>He developed a one-day course on understanding autism that every Seattle police officer has completed, and every new recruit is required to do the same before hitting the streets for patrol.</p> <p>Now, Christman wants to add virtual reality training developed by Axon, which the company says it's already used in 1,100 agencies around the world.</p> <p>In a virtual reality scenario, a young man with autism walks out of a store with an item, triggering a shoplifting call.</p>

The responding officers must evaluate what's happening and how to handle it.

You're actually acting it out," said Robert Murphy, director of Virtual Reality for Axon. "You're engaging with this character and you're getting to a mutually beneficial outcome for that community member as part of the training scenarios.

Officers can also be placed in the role of the subject, meaning they can experience the confusion and stress an individual with autism might have when confronted by flashing police car lights and commands. Murphy says that helps officers develop empathy.

"Our vision is to give public safety officials more information and more context to their communities and what they're going through and that individual (can) help officers have greater tools available to them when they're responding to calls for services," Murphy said.

The VR training doesn't come cheap.

At a cost of \$500,000, the purchase won't come out of city coffers.

Instead, the [Seattle Police Foundation](#) is now working to raise the money through donations.

"Once you make that investment, it's pretty cost effective," said Cherie Skager, the foundation's CEO. "It's mobile. Officers can take advantage of the training at any particular time. As we know, our officers are working a lot right now because of staffing shortages. So even if there's 15 minutes that they can put on the goggles and get some training in, that's a huge win."

The Autism Society estimates 1 in every 5 young adults with autism will encounter police by the time they're 21 years old.

Christopher Banks, president & CEO of the Autism Society of America said, "The Autism Society supports widespread first responder training to create safer interactions, effectively support, and facilitate better outcomes for Autistic individuals in crisis."

"On any call that we go on, slowing down and taking extra time to ask questions or give instructions or wait for responses to those instructions or directions or questions can benefit us across the board," Christman said. "Whether it's someone that has autism or not."

The virtual reality training also includes scenes of domestic violence and people who are suicidal or struggling with mental health.

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HEADLINE	05/11 Covid cases rise amid virus, testing fatigue
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/coronavirus/with-covid-case-counts-rising-some-in-washington-state-report-virus-testing-fatigue
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Fully two years into the global COVID-19 pandemic, some people in Washington state and beyond say they have reached a point of indifference.</p> <p>“At this point, it’s all personal preference, right?” said one person who spoke to KOMO News Wednesday.</p> <p>Even with the number of COVID cases rising in King County, officials said hospitalizations and death rates remain low enough and the number of people seeking a test are at a point to where the county is ready to shutter some of its virus test sites.</p>

“I understand why the county wants to save the money,” one person said in Federal Way. “At home tests are available now.”

In a blog post, officials with Public Health Seattle-King County said they are closing the Federal Way location along with sites in Auburn and Tukwila to help transition to long-term solutions.

The Federal Way and Tukwila sites are set to close May 27, while the one in Auburn will close June 1, officials said.

Part of that is because at-home tests are so much easier to get now.

“I would do one at home because I have one already,” one woman told KOMO News, adding that she is not burnt out from the pandemic but is eager to put it behind her. “I mean, of course it’s not nice, I don’t enjoy it. I’m not burnt out, I’m just like, ‘Let’s move on.’”

While others said the change has shifted from a communal effort to individual choices on how to handle the virus.

“Either people are burnt out or not concerned about it,” one man said.

Dr. Jeff Duchin, the top infectious disease official with King County, said even if people are feeling fatigue the virus is still something to be avoided.

“People are still being hospitalized and are still dying,” he said, adding that the last thing people should want is to get infected and potentially suffer long COVID as a result of letting their guard down. “There’s a lot of COVID out there and it’s increasing.

“COVID is an unpleasant disease that can lead to long-term consequences in the minority,” Duchin said. “And there’s some of us that are still susceptible to severe illness that we can work together to help prevent.”

Part of the next phase for King County will be working with different healthcare partners to make sure testing is still readily available should there be another surge.

They say that may mean reopening some shuttered sites, but it all depends on what the future holds.

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HEADLINE	05/11 Problem: private property homeless camps
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/challenges-posed-by-homeless-camps-on-private-property
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - Neighbors call it a troublesome homeless camp made worse by the lack of action from Seattle city leaders. The encampment sits on private property near the Meta building in South Lake Union, between Aurora and Dexter avenues.</p> <p>While city crews have conducted sweeps at several city parks, complaints about homeless people on private property seem to go nowhere, according to neighbors. Some of those neighbors include a pair of family-owned restaurants, one of which has been broken into four times.</p> <p>“We had our registers taken, our monitors, the security cameras, they grabbed all that,” said Danny Pang, whose family owns Koibito Sushi & Teriyaki.</p> <p>Pang is fairly certain the thief came from the homeless camp because a woman who lives nearby actually saw the burglary in progress and reported it to police.</p> <p>“She saw that the guy was carrying the register up where everyone else is staying,” Pang said, indicating the homeless camp at the top of the hillside.</p>

	<p>It is a similar story next door at gyro and more.</p> <p>“A lot of them do come in and will sleep on the side here and do drugs and I'll watch them walk up to their camp,” said Jibril Mansour with Gyro & More.</p> <p>Mansour said some of the homeless are pleasant and he often gives them free food when they come in. Others are committing crimes in the area, Mansour said, adding that he has witnessed some dangerous behavior.</p> <p>“I've seen two fires up there, two fires down here,” Mansour said, who lives in an apartment building next to the restaurant. “They lit our neighbor's garbage on fire out here and I luckily was just coming home and I caught it. It was in full flame and right next to the building.”</p> <p>Some neighbors acknowledge the challenges but say it stems from a bigger issue.</p> <p>“It's definitely a problem. There have been complaints,” said Katherine Powell, who works in the area. “But it's a problem because housing isn't affordable. People wouldn't be camping if they had a choice.”</p> <p>A development company owns the property and even the fencing they put up doesn't keep people out. The developer has not yet responded to requests for comment, so KOMO News reached out to Mayor Bruce Harrell's office to see what can be done.</p> <p>A spokesperson said city departments are looking into it but they had no immediate answers to provide regarding city intervention or assistance for encampments on private property.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/11 BLM co-founder personal use of mansion?
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/nation-world/blm-co-founder-admits-she-held-parties-at-mansion-bought-with-donor-funds-black-lives-matter-patrisse-cullors-malibu-florida-global-network-foundation-blmgnf
GIST	<p>LOS ANGELES (TND) — Black Lives Matter Co-Founder Patrisse Cullors admitted in an Associated Press interview she spent overnights and hosted multiple personal events at the group's controversial Malibu mansion.</p> <p>Cullors's statements come after she claimed to have “never misappropriated funds” related to the Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation's (BLMGNF) purchase of a \$6 million Malibu home with donor funds.</p> <p><i>I have never misappropriated funds, and it pains me so many people have accepted that narrative without the presence of tangible truth or facts," Cullors said on Instagram, responding to New York Magazine's report outing the group's leadership for potential impropriety.</i></p> <p>BLM leadership has indicated the property was intended as a type of “influencer house,” but reportedly very little was ever filmed there, save a few videos involving Cullors, including one from a series called “Patrisse Tries” during which she attempts unfamiliar tasks, according to New York Magazine.</p> <p><i>It's an example of how Cullors acted as both the head of BLMGNF and cultivated a lucrative public profile at the same time," New York Magazine's Sean Campbell wrote.</i></p> <p>The parties included a birthday party for her son and a get-together celebrating the inauguration of President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris. The inauguration party featured 15 guests from local BLM chapters and other prominent supporters of the movement, Cullors said during her interview with the Associated Press.</p>

Cullors said she intended to pay a rental fee to the foundation for her son's birthday party, according to the Associated Press. The AP apparently confirmed BLMGNF billed her, but when the group billed her, or for how much, is still unclear.

I look back at that and think, that probably wasn't the best idea," Cullors said, referring to the parties.

Cullors also said in her rebuke after the allegations came out that she "never lived" at the controversial property, but during her interview, she acknowledged a four-day stay at the mansion when she held her party celebrating Biden and Harris.

During Campbell's investigation for New York Magazine, he also uncovered that Cullors was allegedly hiring her family to do work at the house.

Cullors's brother allegedly ran security for the house while her mom had been contracted to do a cleaning job there, according to Campbell. Cullors's sister was also found to have signed similar employment documents as other individuals who worked at the property, but Campbell said it was not completely clear if she was working there too.

The National Legal and Policy Center (NLPC), a watchdog group, has filed an IRS complaint seeking civil or criminal penalties against Cullors for her "highly unusual" use of the mansion for her benefit.

The IRS owes the public and supporters of Black Lives Matter a full investigation of the group's finances, management, and cover-up of the use of its \$6 million LA mansion by Patrisse Cullors, even if she thinks compliance with IRS disclosure rules is 'triggering' and causes her and her associates 'trauma,'" said Paul Kamenar, the attorney who drafted the complaint against Cullors for the NLPC, according to [The Washington Examiner](#).

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HEADLINE	05/11 USDA warns grocery prices to jump 5-6%
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/nation-world/usda-warns-grocery-prices-could-jump-5-6-percent-this-year-minnesota-consumer-prices-inflation-interest-rate-hikes
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (WJLA) — Consumers are paying more and more for groceries, and it doesn't look like that will slow down anytime soon.</p> <p>The United States Department of Agriculture predicts grocery prices will jump between 5-6% this year. In response, organizations are coming up with creative ways to get food to the community.</p> <p>In Minnesota, a group purchases food in bulk and then uses buses to bring food directly to urban neighborhoods. The program helps more than 50,000 households keep costs down.</p> <p>The USDA is awarding grants to mobile markets that help people access healthy food.</p> <p>USDA officials on Tuesday reported the following information about food price increases:</p> <p><i>"The all-items Consumer Price Index (CPI), a measure of economy-wide inflation, increased by 1.3% from February 2022 to March 2022 before seasonal adjustment, up 8.5% from March 2021. The CPI for all food increased 1% from February 2022 to March 2022, and food prices were 8.8% higher than in March 2021."</i></p> <p>In 2022, food-at-home prices are predicted to increase between 5-6%, and food-away-from-home prices are predicted to increase between 5.5-6.5%.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/11 Intense storms strike Midwest
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SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/nation-world/more-storms-on-the-way-for-midwest-as-floods-tornadoes-cause-damage-weather-americas-weather-now-flooding-tornado-touches-down-minnesota-wisconsin
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (TND) — An intense line of storms is hitting the Midwest Wednesday night as an active weather pattern continues throughout the region this week.</p> <p>Hundreds of lightning strikes are being recorded every minute and wind speeds over 60 miles per hour have been reported.</p> <p>A tornado watch is in effect for Minnesota's Twin Cities area until 12 a.m.</p> <p>Several warnings are also in effect throughout Minnesota and Wisconsin with significant flooding reported with these storms.</p> <p>The region was hit by damaging storms less than 48 hours ago.</p> <p>The National Weather Service has confirmed that a tornado with wind speeds near 90 miles per hour touched down Monday. That storm produced strong hail and left more than 20,000 people in the dark.</p> <p>More severe weather is expected Thursday. The Storm Prediction Center says strong thunderstorms are expected and tornadoes are possible.</p> <p>May is historically the most active month for tornadoes in the U.S. with seven recorded across the Midwest in just the past 48 hours.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/11 CDC: OD deaths hit record, 1 every 5min.
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/us-overdose-deaths-hit-record-107000-last-year-cdc-says/
GIST	<p>NEW YORK (AP) — More than 107,000 Americans died of drug overdoses last year, setting another tragic record in the nation's escalating overdose epidemic, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated Wednesday.</p> <p>The provisional 2021 total translates to roughly one U.S. overdose death every 5 minutes. It marked a 15% increase from the previous record, set the year before. The CDC reviews death certificates and then makes an estimate to account for delayed and incomplete reporting.</p> <p>Dr. Nora Volkow, director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, called the latest numbers “truly staggering.”</p> <p>U.S. overdose deaths have risen most years for more than two decades. The increase began in the 1990s with overdoses involving opioid painkillers, followed by waves of deaths led by other opioids like heroin and — most recently — illicit fentanyl.</p> <p>Last year, overdoses involving fentanyl and other synthetic opioids surpassed 71,000, up 23% from the year before. There also was a 23% increase in deaths involving cocaine and a 34% increase in deaths involving meth and other stimulants.</p> <p>Overdose deaths are often attributed to more than one drug. Some people take multiple drugs and inexpensive fentanyl has been increasingly cut into other drugs, often without the buyers' knowledge, officials say.</p> <p>“The net effect is that we have many more people, including those who use drugs occasionally and even adolescents, exposed to these potent substances that can cause someone to overdose even with a relatively small exposure,” Volkow said in a statement.</p>

	<p>Experts say the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the problem as lockdowns and other restrictions isolated those with drug addictions and made treatment harder to get.</p> <p>Overdose death trends are geographically uneven. Alaska saw a 75% increase in 2021 — the largest jump of any state. In Hawaii, overdose deaths fell by 2%.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/11 EU lifts mask mandate for air travel
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/eu-lifts-covid-mask-requirement-for-air-travel-as-pandemic-ebbs/
GIST	<p>BERLIN (AP) — The European Union will no longer require masks to be worn at airports and on planes starting next week amid the easing of coronavirus restrictions across the bloc, authorities said Wednesday.</p> <p>The European Union Aviation Safety Agency said it hoped the joint decision, made with the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, would mark “a big step forward in the normalization of air travel” for passengers and crews.</p> <p>The new guideline “takes account of the latest developments in the pandemic, in particular the levels of vaccination and naturally acquired immunity, and the accompanying lifting of restrictions in a growing number of European countries,” the two agencies said in a joint statement.</p> <p>“Passengers should however behave responsibly and respect the choices of others around them,” EASA Executive Director Patrick Ky said. “And a passenger who is coughing and sneezing should strongly consider wearing a face mask, for the reassurance of those seated nearby.”</p> <p>While the new recommendations take effect on May 16, rules for masks may still vary by airline beyond that date if they fly to or from destinations where the rules are different.</p> <p>European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control director Andrea Ammon said washing hands and social distancing should still be practiced, but airport operators are advised not to impose distancing requirements if these are likely to lead to a bottleneck.</p> <p>The agencies also recommended that airlines keep systems for collecting passenger locator information on standby in case they are needed in future, for example if a new dangerous variant emerges.</p> <p>The requirement to wear masks on planes has been in place for about two years. It has occasionally led to disputes between passengers and airlines. German carrier Lufthansa last week denied a large group of Jewish travelers board a plane because some had refused to wear masks. The airline has since apologized for the incident.</p> <p>The decline in reported COVID-19 cases over the past weeks has prompted countries across Europe to roll back pandemic-related restrictions.</p> <p>The German government said Wednesday that it was disbanding a crisis task force appointed to lead the official response.</p> <p>The French government announced separately Wednesday that people will no longer have to wear facemasks in any forms of public transport starting from Monday.</p> <p>Health Minister Olivier Veran, speaking after a Cabinet meeting, said that the decision is part of policies to lift most restrictions as the pandemic is slowing down in the country.</p> <p>French authorities reported this week about 39,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 each day on average, down by 30% compared to last week. The numbers of patients in hospitals have also been steadily decreasing in recent weeks.</p>

	Wearing facemasks will no longer be needed in metros, bus, trains and domestic flights. It is still be requested in hospitals and nursing homes, Veran said.
	France lifted most coronavirus restrictions in March.
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HEADLINE	05/11 Report: 64% living paycheck to paycheck
SOURCE	https://www.cnbc.com/2022/05/11/two-thirds-of-americans-live-paycheck-to-paycheck-as-inflation-climbs.html
GIST	<p>Inflation is showing no signs of slowing down, making it harder for workers to make ends meet. The Consumer Price Index increased 8.3% from a year ago, higher than the 8.1% estimate, according to the U.S. Bureau of Statistics.</p> <p>Although it was down slightly from the March peak, inflation is still growing at the fastest annual pace in about four decades.</p> <p>“Rising prices are putting household budgets in a vise,” said Greg McBride, chief financial analyst at Bankrate.com. “Price increases are widespread, but look at food and shelter — which together account for 40% of the weighting in the CPI and more than that for many households.”</p> <p>Food prices are up at the fastest pace in more than 41 years and the shelter index, which makes up about one-third of the CPI weighting, was up 5.1% on a yearly basis, its fastest gain since March 1991.</p> <p>While wage growth is high by historical standards, it isn’t keeping up with the increased cost of living. When wages rise at a slower pace than inflation, those paychecks won’t go as far at the grocery store and at the gas pump — two areas of the budget that have been particularly squeezed.</p> <p>As of March, close to two-thirds, or 64%, of the U.S. population was living paycheck to paycheck, just shy of the high of 65% in 2020, according to a LendingClub report.</p> <p>“The number of people living paycheck to paycheck today is reminiscent of the early days of the pandemic and it has become the dominant lifestyle across income brackets,” said Anuj Nayar, LendingClub’s financial health officer.</p> <p>Consumers who are struggling to afford their day-to-day lifestyle tend to rely more on credit cards and carry higher monthly balances making them financially vulnerable, the survey of more than 2,600 adults found.</p> <p>Overall, credit card balances rose year over year, reaching \$841 billion in the first three months of 2022, according to a separate report from the Federal Reserve Bank of New York.</p> <p>At this rate, balances could soon reach record levels amid higher prices for gas, groceries and housing, among other necessities, according to Ted Rossman, a senior industry analyst at CreditCards.com.</p> <p>Anyone with revolving debt will also see the annual percentage rate on their credit card head higher as the Federal Reserve hikes interest rates to try and tamp down rising prices.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/11 Consumer prices still rising rapidly
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/05/11/business/inflation-cpi-report-april#april-2022-cpi
GIST	<p>Prices of dairy, eggs and cereals soared in April, pushing up overall inflation as an outbreak of bird flu, the rising cost of fuel and fertilizer, labor shortages and other factors added to prices at restaurants and grocery stores.</p> <p>The price of food rose 0.9 percent in April from the previous month, the 17th consecutive monthly increase, according to the Consumer Price Index compiled by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.</p>

The increase was driven by a 2.5 percent increase in the price of dairy, a 2.0 percent increase in nonalcoholic beverages, and a 10.3 percent increase in the cost of eggs, as avian flu decimated poultry flocks.

But prices of fruits and vegetables declined from the previous month, and the overall pace of rising prices for groceries cooled slightly in April, rising 1.0 percent following an increase of 1.5 percent the previous month.

On an annual basis, the food index was up 9.4 percent from one year ago. An index for meats, poultry, fish and eggs rose 14.3 percent from the previous year, the largest annual increase since 1979.

In the United States, rising prices have particularly affected poorer households, who spend more of their income on food. And [shortages of formula](#), stemming from a nationwide recall and supply chain challenges, have left some parents desperate to feed their babies.

Globally, droughts in some parts of the world have reduced crops, while the war between Russia and Ukraine, two significant food producers, has led to spiraling prices for wheat, sunflower oil and other products. Rising prices are weighing heavily on food-importing countries in eastern Africa and the Middle East.

Ariane Curtis, a global economist at Capital Economics, said in a note Wednesday that the rise in agricultural commodity prices stemming from the war in Ukraine had added 0.6 percentage points to average inflation in advanced economies, but that the effect would fade in the months ahead as price increases cooled.

A statistical quirk — known as a [“base effect”](#) — will start to impact the rate of inflation for food in the coming months. Agricultural prices started to skyrocket in the second half of last year, meaning year-over-year price increases will start to look less steep since they are measured from a higher starting point. Still, pricier food will weigh on consumer spending growth in developed markets, Ms. Curtis wrote.

Amid rising prices and food shortages, dozens of countries have [banned exports](#) of certain food products in the past two months, measures that aim to ensure adequate supplies for their citizens but can exacerbate shortages worldwide.

“If we break down global supply chains for food and agriculture, the food crisis will only become worse,” David W. MacLennan, the chief executive of Cargill, said at a conference hosted by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce on Tuesday. “The worst thing we can do is close down trade as it relates to food.”

On Wednesday morning, the White House [announced](#) it was taking several steps to encourage more production from American farmers, including offering more insurance to farmers who plant a second crop on their land during a year, helping farmers access technology that helps them reduce the use of fertilizer and other inputs, and doubling federal investments in domestic fertilizer production.

President Biden and Tom Vilsack, the secretary of agriculture, are expected to visit a farm in Illinois on Wednesday to talk about how the Russian invasion of Ukraine is raising food prices and how U.S. farmers can help alleviate global food shortages.

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HEADLINE	05/11 Bird flu in 2 Pierce Co. backyard flocks
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/article261347172.html
GIST	An avian flu virus has been spreading across the United States in recent months, infecting birds in 36 states. On Tuesday, bird flu was detected in two noncommercial backyard flocks in Pierce County.

The Washington State Department of Agriculture on Wednesday asked bird owners to take measures to prevent contact between their animals and wild birds. Two cases of bird flu have been confirmed in wild birds in Washington state, and it has been detected in about 1,112 wild birds across the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

More than 37 million poultry have died from the disease. According to Bloomberg, the last time bird flu hit the U.S. was in 2015, when about 50 million animals died.

State and federal labs tested samples from the Pierce County flocks after their owners noticed an unusual number of sudden deaths and reported it to WSDA, according to a news release. Spokesperson Amber Betts said the flocks were made up of about 60 and 40 birds. One was a mixture of chickens and ducks and the other was made up of turkeys and peacocks.

“Avian influenza is here,” state veterinarian Amber Itle said in the news release. “Whether it has been confirmed in your county yet or not, you should be taking steps to protect your birds and prevent the spread of this virus which could wipe out your flock.”

The advisory comes days after the virus was detected in a flock of about 50 birds at a noncommercial farm in Pacific County. Bird flu was also found in a noncommercial flock of about 75 birds in Spokane County.

Avian influenza can be transmitted from wild birds to domestic birds through direct contact, fecal contamination, transmission through the air, environmental contamination, and shared water sources.

The state veterinarian said one step flock owners should take is to eliminate access to ponds or standing water on your property. She said owners should also separate different domestic species. Ducks and geese should be penned separately from chickens and turkeys.

She also advised flock owners to limit access to their farms, not share farm equipment with others and not share or sell eggs from backyard flocks. Eating cooked eggs doesn’t pose a health risk, but transferring eggs off-farm can spread the virus.

WSDA said there is not an immediate public health concern due to avian influenza. According to the CDC, one human in the U.S. has been infected in this outbreak. According to the government agency, only four human infections have been identified in the U.S. since 2002.

The premises of the Pierce County flocks where the virus was detected were quarantined, and all of the birds in the flock that had not already died from the virus were euthanized. In a news conference Friday, Itle said euthanasia was a humane option for them.

“When we’re thinking about animal welfare, personally, if I was a chicken, I might rather have a humane euthanasia than die,” Itle said. “Because it is such a virulent, highly pathogenic virus that, you know, these animals are suffering.”

Unusual deaths or illness among domestic birds should be reported to the WSDA Avian Health Program at 1-800-606-3056. Dead or sick wild birds can be reported to the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife using an online reporting tool or on its website, wdfw.wa.gov.

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HEADLINE	05/11 All Snohomish Co. transfer stations reopen
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/snohomish-county-transfer-stations-reopening-garbage-cleared/281-52e4fe20-bbf7-4285-b095-d0a294023651
GIST	SNOHOMISH COUNTY, Wash — All solid waste transfer stations in Snohomish County will return to regular hours this weekend after crews cleared nearly 5,400 tons of garbage from the facilities, averting a “health and safety emergency.”

Snohomish County Public Works [announced last week](#) that all transfer stations and dropboxes in the county would temporarily close for two full weekends beginning May 7 to clear a backlog of garbage at the facilities. Officials said the backlog of trash had become a “health, safety and environmental issue for customers and staff.”

The county [announced](#) Wednesday that crews were able to clear the trash backlog during the first weekend closure but said the “underlying issues which caused the original emergency persist.”

Snohomish County Public Works crews were able to clear over 10 million pounds of garbage over the weekend from the [Airport Road Recycling and Transfer Station](#) in Everett and the [Southwest Recycling and Transfer Station](#) in Montlake Terrace.

[Officials said last week](#) that one of the garbage piles at the Everett facility contained nearly 7.4 million pounds of trash, while the smaller transfer station in Mountlake Terrace had another 3.5 million pounds of garbage.

“We are so very proud of our staff’s performance and determination,” said Solid Waste Director David Schonhard. “They averted a second weekend of closures through sheer hard work. Safety is our number one concern, and they worked diligently to remedy what was becoming a very untenable situation.”

Snohomish County Public Works Director Kelly Snyder [told KING 5](#) that temperatures deep inside the piles were hitting 130 degrees, posing a serious safety threat.

“It’s getting compacted. It’s getting heated up. That will lead us to have some fire issues,” Snyder said [during a May 4 interview](#). “We have to make sure we get this trash out and to the landfill as quickly as we can.”

Snyder added the Everett facility was on a 24-hour fire watch as steam could be seen wafting from the top of the pile.

Officials said the backlog was due in part to hiring and supply chain issues with contracted waste removal service partners.

Continued backups at ports across the west coast are causing a shortage of shipping containers to haul garbage from transfer stations. The worker shortage at Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad is also slowing down the transport of those containers to landfills.

“We know the closure was an inconvenience, and we appreciate our customers patience last weekend,” Snyder said in a statement on May 11. “We stopped the immediate health and safety hazard, but there is much more work and coordination left to do with the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway, Republic Services, Waste Management and others to prevent additional closures later this spring and summer.”

The last time a facility in Snohomish County was closed due to maximum capacity was in 2008, [according to public works](#).

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HEADLINE	05/11 Average Seattle gas price \$5 first time ever
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/traffic/gas-prices/record-gas-prices-seattle/281-7c89fefe-b3e9-4c1b-93a0-5297186d4c5a
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — The average price for a gallon of regular gas in the Seattle-Bellevue-Everett area hit \$5 for the first time ever on Wednesday, according to AAA.</p> <p>The average as of Wednesday morning was \$5.014, up nearly three cents from Tuesday. That’s up more than \$1.30 compared to a year ago when the average gallon cost \$3.661.</p>

Diesel also hit an all-time high in the Seattle area Wednesday with the average gallon going for \$5.83. AAA's data shows that Washington state's overall average gas price hit an all-time high on Wednesday at \$4.894 per gallon as many areas recorded their highest ever average gas prices.

That's more than 20 cents higher than the state's average a month ago.

In Washington state on Wednesday, the highest average price of gas could be found in San Juan County, with an average of \$4.462 per gallon. The cheapest average gallon of gas in the state is nearly about a dollar less at \$4.466, which can be found clear across the state in Asotin County.

Gas prices continue going up in western Washington and across the country as the cost of oil remains high at around \$100 per barrel as of Tuesday.

There are a few key reasons experts cite for the continued rise in the price of gas in the U.S., including Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine and rising inflation.

President Joe Biden addressed inflation on Tuesday in a speech, during which he called inflation his top domestic priority.

Andrew Gross with AAA told the Associated Press, "There are very few things that a president can do to help lower the cost of oil, and this administration tried to do pretty much everything that it can."

On Wednesday, the U.S. Labor Department released a report [showing that inflation did slow in April](#) following seven months of giant increases that pressured consumers with prices jumping 8.3% over just one year.

However, the report also shows that cost increases in core items led by things like airline tickets, hotel rooms and new cars may hint that inflation may be more deeply rooted than expected.

Meanwhile, relief at the pump may not come for some time. Biden released oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve in November and March hoping to drive prices down, but the effects were temporary.

Plus, the European Union is currently [considering placing an embargo on oil](#) from Russia to further punish the country for invading Ukraine, which could drive prices even higher.

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HEADLINE	05/11 Consumer prices in Seattle up nearly 10%
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/report-consumer-prices-seattle-up-nearly-10-year-ago/OKT2KHUBXJEYJWDBVZSXERO5Q/
GIST	<p>Prices in the Seattle area have risen 2.1 percent since April 2022 and are up 9.1% over the last 12 months, according to a report from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.</p> <p>According to regional commissioner Chris Rosenlund, the April increase was influenced by higher prices for homes and gasoline.</p> <p>Over the last 12 months, consumers in the Seattle area have seen the price of food rise 11.4%, led by higher prices for meats, poultry, fish and eggs.</p> <p>Energy prices have jumped 24.1%, largely due to the increase in prices for a gallon of gasoline, an increase of 36.6%, year over year.</p> <p>Other items that have seen increases year over year include used cars and trucks at 23.2%, household furnishings at 16.4% and shelter at 6.3%.</p>

	Numbers are derived from the Consumer Price Index, which measures the average change in prices over time, where prices are collected in 75 major cities across the country from about 6,000 housing units and about 22,000 retail stores.
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HEADLINE	05/11 Seattle, SPD seek answer 911 alternatives
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/seattle-city-council-spd-seek-answer-911-alternatives/BG6ZA27BYBDRTGQDMQSEEONLPA/
GIST	<p>The Seattle Police Department contracted with the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (NICJR) to conduct an analysis of the types of calls the department handled from the years 2017-2019.</p> <p>The analysis coincided with then-mayor Jenny Durkan’s September 2020 executive order, Reimagining Policing and Community Safety in Seattle. The analysis was meant to inform SPD of recommendations for alternative, non-police responses to certain calls.</p> <p>The analysis found that in reviewing more than 1.2 million calls over the period of 2017-2019, nearly 80% of calls were for non-criminal events, and only 6% were associated with a felony of any kind.</p> <p>The report recommended that SPD use alternative response options for “70% of calls for services that do not require a law enforcement response or are appropriate for a dual response by law enforcement and a community-based/non-law enforcement service provider.”</p> <p>The report also recommended that the city assess its “existing landscape of potential alternative responders” in order to determine their capacity to serve in a new response role.</p> <p>In response to the NICJR report, Seattle Police Chief Adrian Diaz said in a letter to the council last month that SPD “is required to submit quarterly reports on the department’s efforts to identify a non-sworn response for 911 call types that the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (NICJR) categorized as appropriate for a civilian response.”</p> <p>According to a Seattle City Council Statement of Legislative Intent, the quarterly reports are submitted April 1, July 1, and Oct. 1, and they address the types of calls SPD responds to, the percentage of calls that could be handled without SPD involvement, and other calls that would not require a “sworn response,” such as traffic collision reports.</p> <p>Diaz continued to push back on the NICJR report, saying that 97% of calls received by the department are resolved differently than they are initially classified. “In reality, it’s not possible to accurately predict the outcome of every call,” he said. “Consequently, until now, 911 call centers have treated all calls as High or Extreme risk and sent an all-hazard officer, i.e., a police officer.”</p> <p>Diaz says that the department has begun the Risk Managed Project, meant to help determine which calls can be responded to in alternative ways. “This in turn will help decision-makers better understand the nature and scale of these types of calls so that an appropriate alternative response can be identified.”</p> <p>In a committee meeting on Tuesday, though, city councilmember Andrew Lewis disagreed with the police chief’s idea, citing another American city that is making big changes to its 911 response.</p> <p>“What I just don’t understand is Denver has been doing this for two years; Denver has responded to 2,700 calls without any incident or problem dispatched through 911, and they have been able to triage those calls in a way that sends an appropriate response during their pilot,” Lewis said. “Did they go through a similar data analysis project like this? Why haven’t I heard from any of the panels over the last two years of a site visit or a discussion with anyone from Denver about how they respond to these calls?”</p> <p>In response, Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell’s Director of Public Safety Andrew Myerberg says that the city is doing research into cities and programs across the county, Denver included.</p>

	<p>“We are working very vigilantly with a broad swathe of department heads to develop the understanding, and if possible, pivot-to pilot,” Myerberg said. “I’m not sure Denver and how they’re doing their thing should dictate how Seattle does it – it’s going to be relevant information, but I’m not sure it’s dispositive about how we roll out our resources.”</p>
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HEADLINE	05/11 Law enforcement on alert after opinion leak
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/supreme-court-leaked-draft-abortion-opinion-threat-environment/
GIST	<p>State and local law enforcement agencies have issued raw intelligence and situational awareness reports warning of a "highly sensitive and politically charged" threat environment in the wake of the leaked Supreme Court draft opinion, according to several intelligence bulletins obtained by CBS News.</p> <p>Officials are focused on two kinds of emerging threats: foreign state actors attempting to incite violence in the U.S., as well as domestic violent extremists trying to capitalize on the highly charged political environment.</p> <p>Message boards on far-right online platforms continue to host speculative threads on the identity of the individual who leaked the draft Supreme Court opinion and feature coded language targeting places of worship, abortion clinics and the Supreme Court.</p> <p>While there is currently no specific nor credible threat to the U.S. homeland identified in these warnings, police and law enforcement officers across the country remain on high alert, amid a spike in online chatter and in-person demonstrations. Some protesters have been demonstrating outside justices' residences in the D.C. area.</p> <p>"The events of the previous week, associated demonstrations and activities, continue to gain traction and nationwide attention," The Joint Task Force-National Capital Region (JTF-NCR) indicated in its Daily Threat Summary. "Events will remain highly sensitive and politically charged in nature, near-term."</p> <p>The bulletin – dated May 11, 2022 – notes that demonstrations "may become flash points for violence and criminal activity with little to no warning."</p> <p>Supreme Court justices get increased security after Roe v. Wade leak: "The risk is real"</p> <p>On Saturday, Planned Parenthood, Women's March and other abortion rights advocates plan to rally at the Washington Monument at noon. A permit approved by the National Park Service and obtained by CBS News notes there are 17,000 participants expected to attend.</p> <p>Last Wednesday, Fusion Centers nationwide convened a call – along with FBI and DHS participation – to warn of the current threat environment. Officials from FBI's Office of Partner Engagement and DHS' Office of Intelligence & Analysis participated.</p> <p>"A lot of what we have been seeing has been implied threats without specific locations," Mike Sena, president of the National Fusion Center Association, told CBS News.</p> <p>Sena led last week's call with law enforcement partners.</p> <p>"That makes it difficult when you're trying to figure out what crosses that line in online groups," Sena said. And people can have extreme ideologies, there's nothing wrong with that. But it's the discussion of violence, death and destruction that we're concerned about."</p> <p>Of particular concern are foreign influence campaigns pushed by governments that have historically interfered in U.S. elections and widespread political events including Russia, China and Iran.</p>

"Another big concern is that we've got large gatherings of folks potentially demonstrating," Sena said. "All it takes – as we saw in Charlottesville – is one person with a car to cause a lot of havoc. So, there's real concern about protecting mass gatherings of folks out there trying to exercise their first amendment rights."

Justice Department spokesman Anthony Coley said the attorney general "continues to be briefed on security matters related to the Supreme Court and Supreme Court Justices." Garland directed the U.S. Marshals Service to provide additional support to the Marshal of the Supreme Court to help ensure the safety of the justices, Coley also said.

The FBI and the Department of Homeland Security define abortion-related violent extremism as its own distinct category of domestic terrorism, similar to racially motivated extremism or domestic violent extremism, because the threat is so prevalent. According to the FBI and DHS, abortion-related violent extremism "encompasses the potentially unlawful use or threat of force or violence in furtherance of ideological agendas relating to abortion, including individuals who advocate for violence in support of either pro-life or pro-choice beliefs."

A situational awareness bulletin issued by the Maryland Coordination and Analysis Center last week said, "Given historical incidents of anti-abortion violence in the U.S. and Maryland, [recent] developments could embolden violent extremists to engage in attacks or other criminal activity targeting abortion clinic staff, patients, or clinic facilities." It went on to say that the high court, justices and their staff, "abortion-related advocacy groups and abortion-related First Amendment-protected events could be targeted for violence.

The Central Florida Intelligence Exchange warned in a bulletin of anarchist violent extremists issuing online threats to places of worship that support anti-abortion causes. One flagged post read, "Fire to the churches!" and urges followers to use "a combative approach."

Another Twitter account the Florida group highlighted alleged that abortion-related vandals had damaged a Catholic church in Boulder, Colorado. The tweet read, "Attack on Anti-Abortion Church in Boulder, Colorado #AnarchistAction #Boulder #MyBodyMyChoice," and included photos showing a smashed window and spray-painted message of "F*ck the Church, F*ck the State" and "Keep Your Religion Off Our Bodies."

In the wake of demonstrations held outside the homes of conservative Supreme Court Justices, the White House condemned "violence, threats, or vandalism" while defending the right to protest.

After activists picketed outside the Alexandria, Virginia, home of Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito Jr. on Monday night, Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin tweeted that state police were nearby and "closely monitoring" the situation.

In a statement Wednesday, the Department of Homeland Security told CBS News that it "is committed to protecting Americans' freedom of speech and other civil rights and civil liberties, including the right to peacefully protest."

On Tuesday, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said he doesn't see a problem with abortion rights activists protesting at the homes of Supreme Court justices as long as demonstrations remain peaceful.

"If protests are peaceful, yes. My house — there's protests three, four times a week outside my house," Schumer said. "The American way to peacefully protest is OK."

But the second-ranking Democrat in the Senate, Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Dick Durbin, took a different view, calling protests outside justices' homes "reprehensible."

"Stay away from homes and families of elected officials and members of the court," Durbin told CNN.

Senator Chuck Grassley, top Republican on the Judiciary Committee, called these demonstrations "disgraceful."

"This seems to be nothing more than an appalling attempt to intimidate the justices," Grassley said.

The U.S. Marshals Service is assisting Supreme Court police "in response to increased security concerns stemming from the unauthorized release of the draft opinion," it acknowledged in a statement but declined to elaborate on the security measures it's taking.

But potential threats extend beyond those posed to individual justices.

Arson investigators are looking into a fire Sunday inside the headquarters of anti-abortion group, Wisconsin Family Action, where an individual spray-painted a message outside the building. Law enforcement is still working with fire department officials to determine an exact cause.

U.S. Capitol Police temporarily closed roads surrounding the court, last week, erecting an 8-foot fence around the Supreme Court that resembled the barrier put up after the Jan. 6 insurrection.

On Thursday, an anti-abortion activist commonly referred to as the "Pro-Life Spiderman" climbed The New York Times building in New York City and hung two anti-abortion banners, prompting backlash from the pro-abortion rights community.

Last week, a Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) officer was injured after pro-abortion rights demonstrators began throwing rocks and bottles at officers. Nearby, a DHS Federal Protective Service police vehicle was also vandalized during this incident. DHS has since stated that it is reviewing the facts and circumstances surrounding the encounter, which found FPS officers stationed half a mile from the federal building they were assigned to protect.

"DHS's Federal Protective Service (FPS) is responsible for protecting approximately 9,000 federal buildings across the country, including individuals exercising their right to peacefully protest near federal facilities," a DHS spokesperson told CBS News. "The department through FPS is conducting a review of this incident and the actions of any DHS personnel involved according to its standard operating procedures."

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HEADLINE	05/11 Govt. cancels Alaska oil, gas lease sale
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/alaska-oil-and-gas-lease-sale-canceled-biden-administration/
GIST	<p>The Biden administration has canceled one of the most high-profile oil and gas lease opportunities pending before the Interior Department. The decision, which halts the potential to drill for oil in over 1 million acres in the Cook Inlet in Alaska, comes at a challenging political moment, when gas prices are hitting painful new highs.</p> <p>In a statement shared first with CBS News, the Department of the Interior cited a "lack of industry interest in leasing in the area" for the decision to "not move forward" with the Cook Inlet lease sale. The department also halted two leases under consideration for the Gulf of Mexico region because of "conflicting court rulings that impacted work on these proposed lease sales."</p> <p>Federal law requires the Department of the Interior to stick to a five-year leasing plan for auctioning offshore leases. The administration had until the end of the current five-year plan — set to expire at the end of next month — to complete these lease sales.</p> <p>Until now, the White House had remained silent about the massive Alaska lease. However, canceling the sale would be in keeping with political promises President Joe Biden made in the name of halting global warming. But those promises have become a political challenge in the face of prices at the pump.</p>

"They don't want to get hit by the Republicans in light of the high gas prices," one environmental advocate told CBS News, speaking on the condition he not be named because of the sensitivity of the topic.

"They're getting killed on attacks based on inflation. The most visible sign of inflation is high gas prices."

The delicate political situation was evident after a top environmental official showed her hand in an email that copied a CBS News reporter. Gina McCarthy, the White House National Climate Advisor, wrote that "the Cook inlet sale was canceled. It is not proceeding."

Almost immediately, another White House official jumped in to declare that McCarthy got ahead of herself. Interior Department officials said a final decision had not been made. On Wednesday, though, with time running out, the department made its announcement.

Frank Macchiarola, a top official with the American Petroleum Institute, the country's largest oil and gas trade association, called the cancellation of the Cook Inlet lease "another example of the administration's lack of commitment to oil and gas development in the US."

"The President has spoken about the need for additional supplies in the market, but his administration has failed to take action to match that rhetoric," Macchiarola said, adding that politically it would play "not well."

"In the kind of price environment that we're seeing, there are negative consequences to shutting off oil and gas development, both politically and practically," he said.

On Wednesday, the national average price of regular gas hit an all-time high of \$4.40, according to AAA.

For environmental groups, the decision was welcome news. The Alaska offshore lease arrangement would have opened drilling opportunities over a span of more than 1 million acres for 40 or more years of production. The new activity would have led to new underwater pipelines and platforms in the environmentally-sensitive area.

Drew Caputo, vice president of litigation for lands, wildlife and oceans for the environmental advocacy group Earthjustice, said more than a decade would pass before those leases could have had an impact on gas prices.

"It's good for the climate, which can't handle new oil and gas development," Caputo said. "It's good for Cook Inlet because offshore drilling is dangerous and disruptive. And it's good for the people of Cook Inlet, including native people, who cherish the inlet in its natural state. So it's a really good thing."

Still, any decision that worked against the interests of oil and gas involves political trade-offs. According to a recent CBS News poll, Mr. Biden's approval rating is lowest when it comes to the economy and inflation, with 69% of those surveyed disapproving of his handling of inflation. Sixty-five percent of respondents said they believed the president "could do more" to lower gas prices.

American Petroleum Institute senior vice president Frank Macchiarola said in a statement, "Unfortunately, this is becoming a pattern - the administration talks about the need for more supply and acts to restrict it. As geopolitical volatility and global energy prices continue to rise, we again urge the administration to end the uncertainty and immediately act on a new five-year program for federal offshore leasing."

But environmentalists argue the climate issue is too important to get caught up in political battles.

"The scientists are telling us the time to shift from fossil fuel energy is not years from now," Caputo said. "It's today. We need to end offshore oil leasing."

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HEADLINE	05/12 Recognizing 1M lives lost to Covid-19
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/biden-1-million-american-lives-lost-covid-19/

GIST	<p>President Biden is commemorating the 1 million American lives lost to COVID-19 early Thursday, hours before he hosts the second Global COVID Summit at the White House, a virtual gathering of world leaders, non-governmental organizations and private sector companies.</p> <p>In recognition of the disease's high toll, Mr. Biden will be issuing a proclamation ordering flags to be flown at half-staff. In remarks he recorded for the opening of the summit, Mr. Biden will speak about those Americans who have died as a result of the two-year-long coronavirus pandemic.</p> <p>In a statement issued early Thursday, the president said, "To those who are grieving, and asking yourself how will you go on without him or what will you do without her, I understand. I know the pain of that black hole in your heart. It is unrelenting. But I also know the ones you love are never truly gone. They will always be with you.</p> <p>"As a nation, we must not grow numb to such sorrow. To heal, we must remember. We must remain vigilant against this pandemic and do everything we can to save as many lives as possible, as we have with more testing, vaccines, and treatments than ever before. It's critical that Congress sustain these resources in the coming months.</p> <p>"In remembrance, let us draw strength from each other as fellow Americans. For while we have been humbled, we never give up. We can and will do this together as the United States of America."</p> <p>The virus ranks only behind only heart disease and cancer among America's leading causes of death over the past two years, claiming vastly more lives than other infectious diseases. By comparison, the flu season of 2017-18, one of the deadliest in recent decades, claimed an estimated 52,000 lives.</p> <p>The pace of COVID-19 deaths has been slowing recently. The 7-day moving average is now around 300 reported per day — down from over 3,000 per day in February.</p> <p>Federal health officials say vaccinations have significantly reduced the number of deaths — and could have saved even more lives if more Americans had gotten the shots. In recent months, the growing availability of effective COVID-19 treatments has also helped lessen the toll.</p> <p>CDC survey data suggests vaccination rates are now similar among adults of all races, though booster shots are lagging among Hispanic and Black adults.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/11 Forecast: hospitalizations, deaths to rise
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/covid-19-hospital-admissions-deaths-expected-climbing-us/story?id=84645187
GIST	<p>Amidst the nation's latest resurgence in COVID-19 infections, new forecast models used by the CDC show that daily hospital admission levels and new virus-related deaths in the U.S. are projected to continue increasing over the next four weeks.</p> <p>The forecast comes as a growing number of COVID-19 positive patients are entering hospitals and requiring care each day, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.</p> <p>There are now more than 20,000 virus-positive Americans currently receiving care in the U.S., the data shows — the highest total number of patients hospitalized since mid-March. On average, more than 2,500 virus-positive Americans are entering the hospital each day -- a total that has increased by 18.1% in the last week. This also marks the highest number of patients entering the hospital in nearly two months.</p> <p>However, totals remain significantly lower than during other parts of the pandemic when there were more than 160,000 patients hospitalized with the virus in January.</p>

The forecast also predicts that about 5,400 deaths will occur over the next two weeks. California, New York and Florida are projected to see the largest death tolls in the weeks to come.

A new ABC News analysis this week [showed a growing proportion](#) of COVID-19 deaths are occurring among the vaccinated. In August 2021, about 18.9% of COVID-19 deaths were occurring among the vaccinated. Six months later, in February 2022, that percent of deaths had increased to more than 40%.

Comparatively, in September 2021, just 1.1% of COVID-19 deaths were occurring among Americans who had been fully vaccinated and boosted with their first dose. By February 2022, that percent of deaths had increased to about 25%.

Health experts said vaccines and boosters continue to provide significant protection against severe disease. However, waning immunity re-emphasizes the urgency of boosting older Americans and high-risk Americans with additional doses.

During an interview with CBS News on Tuesday, Dr. Anthony Fauci acknowledged there has been an increase in the number of vaccinated people who are dying of COVID-19, many of whom are elderly, immunocompromised or have underlying conditions.

"As long as you have vulnerable people in the population, even though the unvaccinated are going to be much more at risk, even vaccinated with underlying conditions and a high degree of susceptibility to severe disease will account for those deaths," he said.

The other group of Americans, who are becoming severely ill and dying, is still the unvaccinated, Fauci said. He stressed that a large proportion — about a third of Americans — have not been fully vaccinated, while about half of eligible Americans are still unboosted with their first dose.

Fauci said that in order for the U.S. to move into an endemic phase, the prevalence of the virus across the country has to come down.

"What we're hoping for is that when the level comes down, it stays in a well-controlled level, and those people who've been vaccinated and boosted even though they might get infected, they won't get a severe disease that would lead to hospitalization, and tragically in many cases, to deaths of individuals," Fauci explained.

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HEADLINE	05/11 Most Covid transmission is asymptomatic
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/covid-transmission-asymptomatic/story?id=84599810
GIST	<p>A cough or sneeze in the checkout line at the grocery store may elicit fear of COVID-19, but that maskless person quietly sitting next to you on the subway could pose just as much of a threat, public health experts say.</p> <p>A significant proportion of COVID-19 transmission is asymptomatic or presymptomatic -- potentially as high as 60%, according to a 2021 JAMA Network Open modeling study.</p> <p>That may be even higher now, as early reports have signaled a greater percentage of asymptomatic infections from omicron than from previous variants. That could have a lot to do with higher baseline levels of immunity in the population when that variant hit, Dr. Helen Chu, an infectious diseases physician at the University of Washington School of Medicine, told MedPage Today.</p> <p>Chu said the more exposure to COVID-19 that an individual has -- either in terms of prior infection or vaccination -- the broader the immunity and the better the ability to control the virus. In such cases, an individual is more likely to be asymptomatic or have mild symptoms, she said.</p>

Those with diminished viral loads may be less likely to transmit the disease, but they can still infect others, she said. And breakthrough cases can still carry high viral loads, as was observed in the Provincetown, Massachusetts outbreak in July 2021.

“Spaces that are not well ventilated, have large numbers of individuals and places where people are speaking loudly or eating, those are the spaces that we should be most concerned about,” Chu said.

Estimates of asymptomatic disease rates with COVID-19 -- the proportion who are infected but never manifest symptoms -- have ranged from about 25% to 40% throughout the pandemic, with a number of papers, including one in the Annals of Internal Medicine, coming in at about a third of cases.

There are no data yet on whether omicron’s subvariants, such as BA.2 and BA.4 and BA.5, cause more asymptomatic infections, Dr. Otto Yang, an infectious diseases physician at the David Geffen School of Medicine at the University of California, Los Angeles, told MedPage Today.

But he also noted that high levels of population immunity puts the U.S. in a “completely different situation from earlier when there weren’t vaccines and few people had been infected.”

Nonetheless, both Chu and Yang said the high rate of asymptomatic and presymptomatic transmission highlights the need for continued mitigation measures, especially to protect vulnerable populations such as children under 5 and the immunocompromised.

“We know what works, and I just find it puzzling that we aren’t continuing to do the things that work when we know that there’s long COVID, the under-fives are unvaccinated, and people can get repeatedly infected over time,” Chu said. “We can’t get to zero COVID, but it just surprises me that so many things have stopped, and in a time in which we have very little surveillance.”

Yang also cautioned that continued transmission brings “more opportunity for new variants to develop, and the next variant could be more deadly for all we know.”

Just last month, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that, as of February, more than half of the U.S. population has been infected with COVID-19, including 75% of children and adolescents. About a third became newly seropositive since December 2021, when omicron became predominant in the U.S.

CDC noted that seroprevalence can improve understanding of population-level incidence of COVID-19 because some cases are asymptomatic, not diagnosed, or not reported. It stated, however, that seropositivity for antibodies produced in response to infection should not be interpreted as protection from future infection.

There also remains a concern about long COVID following infection, even one that occurs without acute symptoms, experts said.

“Given that community transmission levels are rising in most of the U.S., it is important we continue to layer mitigation measures to prevent further spread and exposure to the virus even if you are vaccinated,” said Dr. Syra Madad of Harvard’s Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs. “While the risk at the individual level may be low if you are not in the high-risk category, and we have more tools to manage the disease including antivirals, the risk to the overall community is still high.”

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HEADLINE	05/12 Finland to apply to NATO ‘without delay’
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/finland-sweden-set-announce-stance-nato-membership/story?id=84595411
GIST	LONDON and HELSINKI -- Finland's leaders on Thursday said the country would apply to join NATO "without delay."

"Finland must apply for NATO membership without delay," President Sauli Niinistö and Prime Minister Sanna Marin said in a joint statement. "We hope that the national steps still needed to make this decision will be taken rapidly within the next few days."

Leaders in both Sweden and Finland had been expected to announce their positions on joining NATO this week, as the war in Ukraine continues to have unintended consequences for Russia by potentially pushing two more of its neighbors to the transatlantic alliance.

Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs Ann Linde said on Thursday that Finland's leaders had delivered an "important message," adding that her country "will decide after the report from the security policy consultations has been presented." Sweden's ruling party is expected to announce its position on May 15. Finland's parliament is expected to debate the issue and then vote a day later.

The Scandinavian countries have long held neutral status when it comes to European conflict. Finland became a neutral country after the Second World War, while Sweden has resisted military alliances long before that.

Yet fears that Russia could do to other non-NATO countries what it has done to Ukraine has sparked a rapid shift in public opinion in both countries, one of which, Finland, shares an 830-mile land border with Russia.

Both could be on the cusp of joining NATO. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg has publicly said the Nordic countries would be welcomed into the alliance.

Ahead of any official announcement from both countries for NATO membership, U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson signed mutual security assurances in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

NATO's expansion would be yet another unintended consequence for Russia, as they continue to be met with fierce resistance in Ukraine and a more united West than their intelligence assessments anticipated. Part of Russia's security demands ahead of the invasion in Ukraine included reverting NATO forces to 1997 positions.

Since NATO was founded in 1949, the alliance has expanded to include 30 member countries, including three former Soviet republics, and the inclusion of Sweden and Finland would further expand the alliance's influence in the Arctic and in the areas around Russia.

Stoltenberg said just days ahead of the invasion "if Kremlin's aim is to have less NATO on Russia's borders, it will only get more NATO. And if it wants to divide NATO, it will only get an even more united Alliance."

This prediction now appears to be coming true -- although Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov last month said that NATO is a "tool sharpened for confrontation" and it is "not an alliance that ensures peace and stability" when asked about Sweden and Finland. Experts say the expansion will be evidence of yet another strategic blunder on Russia's part.

Even as public opinion has shifted, there are still those that opposes NATO membership for the Nordic countries, fearing it would lead to increased tensions with Russia.

"I'm afraid that NATO membership will increase actually the tensions in the Baltic Sea region and also will increase the tensions in Finland, especially regarding the eastern border," Veronika Honkasalo, one of the few members of Finland's parliament who doesn't believe the country should join, told ABC News.

Furthermore, there are concerns that Sweden and Finland could be vulnerable to Russian attacks during the application process, though State Department spokesperson Ned Price moved to reassure both

	<p>countries last week, saying: "I am certain that we will find ways to address concerns they may have regarding the period between the potential application and the final ratification."</p> <p>However, polling reported in both countries appears to show a significant majority are in favor of NATO membership.</p> <p>"[Putin] has for years said Finland and Sweden joining is a red line," Charly Saloniuss-Pasternak, lead researcher at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs, told ABC News. "He's managed to drive both Finland and Sweden towards NATO. So I think a massive miscalculation for him, but I think a positive thing for the rest of Europe."</p> <p>"It's very clearly the population that changed its opinion in, say, six months, radically so," he said, adding that the shift in public opinion had a snowball effect into Sweden, as fears grew about what could happen without the umbrella protection of NATO membership as the war in Ukraine continued.</p> <p>"Now Russia has gone so far that joining NATO seems to be the only genuine solution here," he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/12 Russia continues steel mill airstrikes
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/ukraine-offers-swap-prisoners-hurt-mariupol-fighters-84661451
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine -- Russian forces were continuing their airstrikes on the Azovstal steel mill in Mariupol and pressing their advance on towns in eastern Ukraine, the general staff of Ukraine's armed forces said Thursday.</p> <p>The bombardment came as Ukraine offered to release Russian prisoners of war in exchange for the safe evacuation of the badly injured fighters that remained trapped inside the mill in the ruined city.</p> <p>Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said that negotiations were underway to release the injured fighters who are holed up in the last bastion of Ukrainian resistance in Mariupol. She said there were different options, but "none of them is ideal."</p> <p>An adviser to the Mariupol mayor said Russian forces have blocked all evacuation routes out of the city. Petro Andriushchenko said there are few apartment buildings fit to live in and little food or drinking water. He said some remaining residents are cooperating with occupying Russian forces in exchange for food.</p> <p>"The occupiers turned Mariupol into a medieval ghetto," said Mayor Vadym Boychenko in comments published by City Hall, as he called for a complete evacuation of the city.</p> <p>Elsewhere, Kyiv was preparing for its first war crimes trial of a captured Russian soldier, who is alleged to have gunned down an unarmed civilian riding a bicycle.</p> <p>And overnight airstrikes in the northern Chernihiv region killed three people and injured 12, according to local media citing emergency services. The regional governor said the strikes on the town of Novhorod-Siverskyi damaged a boarding school, dormitory and administrative building.</p> <p>In its operational statement for Day 78 of the war, the Ukrainian military said Russian forces also fired artillery and grenade launchers at Ukrainian troops in the direction of Zaporizhzhia, which has been a refuge for civilians fleeing Mariupol.</p> <p>The military said Russian forces had fired artillery at Ukrainian units north of the city of Kharkiv in northeast Ukraine, and reported Russian strikes in the Chernihiv and Sumy regions to the north.</p> <p>Across the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of eastern Ukraine, the site of sustained fighting since the war began, the Ukrainian general staff noted "partial success" in Russia's advance. It said Ukrainian forces</p>

repulsed nine attacks by Russian forces and destroyed several drone and military vehicles. The information could not be independently verified.

Ukraine's top prosecutor said her office charged Russian Sgt. Vadin Shyshimarin, 21, in the killing of an unarmed 62-year-old civilian who was gunned down while riding a bicycle in February, four days into the war. Shyshimarin, who served with a tank unit, was accused of firing through a car window on the man in the northeastern village of Chupakhivka.

Prosecutor General Iryna Venediktova said the soldier could get up to 15 years in prison. She did not say when his trial would start. Venediktova's office has said it has been investigating more than 10,700 allegations of war crimes committed by Russian forces and has identified over 600 suspects.

Many of the atrocities came to light last month after Moscow's forces aborted their bid to capture Kyiv and withdrew from around the capital, exposing mass graves and streets and yards strewn with bodies in towns such as Bucha. Residents told of killings, burnings, rape, torture and dismemberment.

Volodymyr Yavorskyy of the Center for Civil Liberties said the Ukrainian human rights group will be closely following Shyshimarin's trial to see if it is fair. "It's very difficult to observe all the rules, norms and neutrality of the court proceedings in wartime," he said.

On the economic front, Ukraine shut down a pipeline that carries Russian gas across Ukraine to homes and industries in Western Europe, marking the first time since the start of the war that Kyiv disrupted the westward flow of one of Moscow's most lucrative exports.

The move was made, Ukraine's natural gas pipeline operator said, to stop Russian gas flowing through a station in part of eastern Ukraine controlled by Moscow-backed separatists because enemy forces were interfering with the station's operation and siphoning gas.

The immediate effect is likely to be limited, in part because Russia can divert the gas to another pipeline and because Europe relies on a variety of suppliers. Still, the cutoff underscored the broader risk to gas supplies from the war.

In the southern Kherson region, site of the first major Ukrainian city to fall in the war, a Moscow-appointed leader said officials there want Russian President Vladimir Putin to annex the area. Kirill Stremousov, deputy head of the Kherson regional administration appointed by Moscow, told Russia's RIA Novosti news agency: "The city of Kherson is Russia."

That was something at least one resident contested. "All people in Kherson are waiting for our troops to come as soon as possible," said a teacher who gave only her first name, Olga, out of fear of retaliation. "Nobody wants to live in Russia or join Russia."

The development raised the possibility that the Kremlin would seek to break off another piece of Ukraine as it tries to salvage an invasion gone awry. Russia annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula, which borders the Kherson region, after a disputed referendum in 2014, a move denounced as illegal and rejected by most of the international community.

Inside Kherson, people have taken to the streets to decry the Russian occupation. Olga, the teacher, said such protests are impossible now because Moscow's troops "kidnapped activists and citizens simply for wearing Ukrainian colors or ribbons." She said "people are scared of talking openly outside their homes" and "everyone walks on the street quickly."

A Black Sea port of roughly 300,000, Kherson provides Crimea with access to fresh water and is seen as a gateway to wider Russian control over southern Ukraine.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said it would be up to residents in the region to decide whether an appeal to annex should be made. He said any move to annex territory would have to be closely evaluated by legal experts to make sure it is “absolutely legitimate, as it was with Crimea.”

Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak tweeted: “The invaders may ask to join even Mars or Jupiter. The Ukrainian army will liberate Kherson, no matter what games with words they play.”

Ukraine, meanwhile, was targeting Russian air defenses and resupply vessels on Snake Island in the Black Sea in an effort to disrupt Moscow’s efforts to expand its control over the coastline, according to the British Ministry of Defense.

Ukraine said it also shot down a cruise missile targeting the Black Sea port city of Odesa.

Evacuees from towns in the embattled east wiped away tears as they carried their children and belongings onto buses and vans to flee.

“It is terrible there now. We were leaving under missiles,” said Tatiana Kravstova, who left the town of Siversk with her 8-year-old son Artiom on a bus headed to the city of Dnipro. “I don’t know where they were aiming at, but they were pointing at civilians.”

Another evacuee, 15-year-old Dima Molchan, said: “You can overcome famine, you can overcome coldness but it is very difficult to overcome the war. After the war many children have no future, many elderly have no past. The war is frightening, it is a horror.”

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HEADLINE	05/11 Settlement in deadly Miami condo collapse
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/billion-settlement-announced-deadly-surfside-condo-collapse/story?id=84653479
GIST	<p>A nearly \$1 billion settlement in last year's shocking collapse of a Miami Beach-area condo building was unexpectedly announced during a routine status conference in a Florida courtroom Wednesday afternoon.</p> <p>Lawyers involved in the class-action lawsuit representing tenants from the oceanfront building in Surfside announced a \$997 million settlement had been reached.</p> <p>Upon the news, Miami-Dade Circuit Judge Michael Hanzman said he was "speechless."</p> <p>"That's incredible news," the judge said.</p> <p>"I'm shocked by this result -- I think it's fantastic," the judge told the courtroom. "This is a recovery that is far in excess of what I had anticipated."</p> <p>Litigation stemming from the catastrophic collapse in June 2021, which killed 98 people, had been moving slowly as the first anniversary approached.</p> <p>The 12-story residential building partially collapsed around 1:15 a.m. on June 24 at the Champlain Towers South condominium in the beachside town of Surfside, about 6 miles north of Miami Beach. Approximately 55 of the oceanfront complex's 136 units were destroyed, authorities said.</p> <p>The final victim's remains were identified more than a month later, on July 26, following a massive search and rescue mission that become a recovery operation.</p> <p>The victims killed ranged from young children to elderly couples, and included families, longtime Surfside residents and tourists staying in the building.</p> <p>"Some of the victims can never recover from this loss and we know that," Hanzman said in court.</p>

The settlement will cover families of those who died as well as survivors, according to lawyers on the case.

The judge said he wants the whole settlement finalized by the one-year anniversary on June 24, with payouts made by the fall. Motions for preliminary approval will be due no longer than a week from Wednesday.

"My goal was to do everything humanly possible to conclude this case by the first anniversary of the collapse," he said.

All funds for the victims will go through the receivership.

"Today is one of those days in a career that I think we're going to look back on," attorney Michael Goldberg, the court-appointed receiver who will oversee the payouts, said in court.

One of the lead attorneys in the case, Judd Rosen, told ABC News that the settlement "represents accountability from a lot of different players."

"It's the largest settlement from a single incident in U.S. history," Rosen said. "The number itself implies significant accountability on what happened."

Plaintiffs in the class-action lawsuit argued that the poor construction and maintenance of Champlain Towers South turned catastrophic with the development of a new luxury tower next door.

"CTS [Champlain Towers South] was an older building in need of routine repairs and maintenance, but it was not until excavation and construction began on the luxury high-rise condominium project next door, known as 'Eighty-Seven Park,' that CTS became so badly damaged and destabilized as to be unsafe," the lawsuit stated. "First, the developers of Eighty-Seven Park improperly obtained the right to build higher and larger than originally entitled, including by buying a public street just a few feet from CTS's foundation. Then they undertook destructive excavation and site work dangerously close to CTS, sloped their project so that water poured into CTS and corroded its structural supports, and drove sheet piles 40 feet into the ground, causing tremors and vibrations at such high levels that they cracked tiles and walls at CTS and shook the structure."

Owners and insurers of Eighty-Seven Park had consistently denied any responsibility for the collapse.

Defendants named in the lawsuit included the Champlain Towers South Condominium Association and developers involved in the Eighty-Seven Park project.

The Champlain Condominium Towers South was built in 1981. It was in the process of a county-mandated inspection for commercial and residential buildings 40 years after they're constructed when the building came crashing down.

In the wake of the collapse, Miami-Dade County inspected more than 500 buildings that were approaching the 40-year recertification deadline to identify any obvious structural concerns.

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HEADLINE	05/11 Southern Calif. fire prompts evacuations
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/coastal-fire-prompts-evacuations-homes-ablaze-southern-california/story?id=84658661
GIST	Several homes were destroyed in Southern California Wednesday night as the Coastal Fire continued to spread.

	<p>At least 20 homes were burned down in Laguna Niguel and the fire had reached approximately 200 acres, according to the Orange County Fire Authority, which said it had "60 different types of resources battling the flames."</p> <p>Evacuation orders have been issued for Coronado Pointe Drive, Vista Court and Via Las Rosa in the Pacific Island area, the Orange County Sheriff's Department said. Voluntary evacuations are in place for Laguna Beach residents in the Balboa Nyes, or Portafina, neighborhood.</p> <p>OCFA Chief Brian Fennessy said late Wednesday there are no reports of civilian or firefighter casualties. The crews fighting the blaze are starting to get a better handle on the fire and "great progress" is expected into the night and coming days, Fennessy said.</p> <p>The cause of the fire is unknown and an investigation is underway, according to the fire chief.</p> <p>Fennessy said the fire started quickly and moved upslope over steep terrain, proving a challenge for hand crews to access. With fuels beds throughout the West being so dry, blazes like the Coastal Fire will "be more commonplace," he said, adding that when winds couple with dry fuel, "fire is going to run on us."</p> <p>Strong winds were blowing embers into the attics of homes making it hard for firefighters to extinguish the blazes, as fires were jumping from house to house within the neighborhood, which is full of multimillion-dollar homes.</p> <p>Laguna Niguel is south of Laguna Beach and about 25 miles down the coast from Huntington Beach.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/11 Recall: Hyundai Sonata sedans
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/hyundai-recalls-215k-sonatas-faulty-hoses-leak-fuel-84644174
GIST	<p>DETROIT -- Hyundai is recalling more than 215,000 midsize cars in the U.S. — most for a second time — because fuel hoses can leak in the engine compartment and cause fires.</p> <p>The recall covers certain 2013 and 2014 Sonata sedans, many of which were recalled for the same problem in 2020.</p> <p>The Korean automaker says in documents posted Wednesday by U.S. safety regulators that a low pressure fuel hose can crack over time due to heat from the engine. That can cause fuel leaks and increase the risk of a fire.</p> <p>In the 2020 recall, dealers inspected the hoses and replaced them if they were damaged. If not, heat-resistant tape was installed. This time all of the faulty hoses will be replaced.</p> <p>Hyundai says in documents that it has 138 reports of problems in the U.S., but no confirmed crashes, fires or injuries.</p> <p>Owners will be notified starting July 5.</p> <p>The new recall comes after the U.S. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration stepped up a series of investigations into engine compartment fires that have plagued Hyundai and related automaker Kia.</p> <p>In December, the agency consolidated two investigations from 2017 into a new a new engineering analysis covering more than 3 million vehicles from the 2011 through 2016 model years. At the time, NHTSA had received 161 complaints of engine fires, some of which occurred in vehicles that had already been recalled.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/11 Court filing: music festival injuries, deaths
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SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/2400-astroworld-attendees-needed-medical-treatment-deadly-concert/story?id=84646968
GIST	<p>Nearly 2,400 people required medical treatment following last year's deadly Astroworld music festival in Houston, according to a new court filing.</p> <p>Attorneys representing thousands of people suing promoter Live Nation, headliner Travis Scott and dozens of other companies over the tragedy said in a court document filed this week that 732 claimants sustained an injury requiring "extensive medical treatment" during the concert on Nov. 5, 2021. Another 1,649 claimants suffered an injury requiring "less extensive medical treatment," according to the filing, which does not define the injury categories.</p> <p>Additionally, the injuries of another 2,540 claimants are under review, attorneys said.</p> <p>"Plaintiffs will continue to evaluate and update this for the Court as additional information and details are received and reviewed," the attorneys stated in the document, filed in the 11th Judicial District in Harris County on Monday.</p> <p>Ten people died in a massive crowd surge during Scott's set, including a victim as young as 9 who was trampled in a crowd of 50,000 people at NRG Park, according to officials.</p> <p>According to Houston Police and witness accounts, a wave of tens of thousands of people surged toward the stage when Scott -- and later rapper Drake -- appeared. Concert attendees say they were pushed into one another from all sides. As the crowd pressed its way forward, some began to fall, pass out and get trampled by others in the audience.</p> <p>Hundreds of lawsuits filed against the event organizers, managers and performers in the wake of the tragedy were consolidated and are being handled by one judge.</p> <p>Following the concert, Scott released a statement on Twitter, saying, "I'm absolutely devastated by what took place last night. My prayers go out to the families and all those impacted by what happened at Astroworld festival."</p> <p>In an extensive interview with radio host Charlamagne Tha God in December, the rapper said he was unaware of the injuries and fatalities among fans until after his performance was over.</p> <p>Asked if he feels responsible for the tragedy, Scott said, "I have a responsibility to figure out what happened here. I have a responsibility to figure out the solution."</p> <p>In a statement to ABC News in the days after the concert, Live Nation said it was working with law enforcement to get answers.</p> <p>"We continue to support and assist local authorities in their ongoing investigation so that both the fans who attended and their families can get the answers they want and deserve, and we will address all legal matters at the appropriate time," Live Nation said.</p> <p>The Houston Police Department is investigating the deadly concert. The House Oversight and Reform Committee also launched a probe into the deaths late last year.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/11 Horn of Africa: millions at risk from famine
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/millions-lives-risk-famine-stalks-horn-africa/story?id=84643535
GIST	In northern Kenya's drought-stricken Turkana County, a group of children carried sacks of palm fruit atop their heads as they walked across the parched earth back to their tiny village.

They walk more than 20 miles to gather the small, bulbous fruit from the African oil palm several times a week. It will be their breakfast, lunch and dinner. One of the children, Ekiru, said the last time he ate something other than palm fruit was when a goat died of starvation and his village divided up the carcass.

"There is nothing else," Ekiru's grandmother, Nakaleso Lobuin Nipayan, told ABC News. "When the palm fruit go away, we will die."

Famine is just around the corner for many others here. Up to 20 million people across the wider Horn of Africa region could go hungry this year as delayed rains exacerbate extreme drought amid soaring prices of food and fuel as well as a shortfall in humanitarian aid, according to the World Food Programme, the food-assistance branch of the United Nations.

"If they don't receive assistance, we will see them go into something we call severe acute malnutrition," Lauren Landis, WFP's country director for Kenya, told ABC News. "And there's the threat of death."

According to a report released Wednesday by the U.N. Convention to Combat Desertification, the number and duration of droughts have increased 29% globally since 2000. While droughts represent just 15% of the world's natural disasters, they took the largest human toll -- approximately 650,000 deaths from 1970 to 2019. This year, more than 2.3 billion people face water stress, while almost 160 million children are exposed to severe and prolonged droughts, according to the report.

The report, entitled "Drought In Numbers, 2022," warned that unless action is stepped up, an estimated 700 million people will be at risk of being displaced by drought by 2030; an estimated one in four children will live in areas with extreme water shortages by 2040, and droughts may affect over three-quarters of the world's population by 2050.

Following several consecutive poor rainy seasons, the Horn of Africa is facing what's been described as its worst drought since 1981. Aid workers fear the outcome will be deadlier than the severe drought that affected all of East Africa between 2011 and 2012, claiming the lives of an estimated 260,000 people.

In Kenya, the drought has been declared a national emergency. Between 80% and 90% of reservoirs and dams are drying up in Turkana, Kenya's largest and northwesternmost county. It is also one of the hottest and driest. The communities here can no longer survive on farming, fishing or livestock.

ABC News traveled to Turkana County with the International Rescue Committee in early May. At an IRC-run hospital within a refugee camp in the rural town of Kakuma, cases of malnutrition have increased four-fold in recent months. The refugees had fled their homes in neighboring countries and crossed into Kenya -- considered one of the richest East African economies -- only to find little food or water.

"People [are] coming from all over the region thinking that they can find safety and nourishment in Kenya," Dr. Sila Monthe, who works at the Kakuma refugee camp, told ABC News. "[But] Kenya is in a drought and can't really support all of these people."

The hospital's pediatric wing is reaching capacity, with currently an average of 20 admissions per day, according to Monthe. Many of the children being treated here exhibit the telltale signs of severe malnutrition, with some even too weak to cry.

"People have been dying just trying to get to the hospital," Monthe added.

Although the success rate of the pediatric wing's stabilization ward is consistently above 85%, Monthe said that means 15% of the patients -- mostly young children -- still die.

"Because they are so malnourished, the whole body shuts down," she told ABC News. "That includes the digestive tract, so they're usually unable to digest food."

The situation in the Horn of Africa has also been compounded by the fallout from a war on another continent, thousands of miles away.

Since Russian forces invaded neighboring Ukraine in February, the cost of grain, fuel and fertilizer has skyrocketed worldwide, worsening hunger crises. Many countries in East Africa rely on Russia and Ukraine for a significant percentage of these agricultural commodities, according to data collected by the U.N.'s Food and Agriculture Organization.

The Kenyan government also raised the price of petroleum products for March, April and May, citing the conflict in Ukraine. Meanwhile, the cost of WFP's local food basket -- the minimum food needs per family per month -- has increased by 23% in the past year, driven in part by the Ukraine war.

Back in Ekiro's village, near the town of Lorugum, he and his grandmother smashed palm fruit against rocks to extract the fibrous, faintly sweet flesh.

"This normally will sustain them until God remembers them," the grandmother, Nipayan, told ABC News, noting that she has "never seen" a drought as "bad" as this.

Thunderclouds suddenly rolled in overhead and it began to pour with rain.

"I feel happy," said Ekiro, whose name means "rain" in the Turkana language.

But the sporadic and localized rainfall is not enough, even as it triggers a deluge in Ekiro's village.

"We were hoping that this rain will be good enough to be able to pull out some of the population out of the situation they were in," Shashwat Saraf, the International Rescue Committee's regional emergency director for East Africa, told ABC News. "But this rain also feeling and being below average will actually result in catastrophic consequences for the population."

"We are talking about lives of millions of people in the region," he added, "and I think we cannot say in words in terms of what it means for those individuals and families that are impacted by this crisis."

One of the goats belonging to Ekiro's family died during the recent heavy rain, providing them with a rare meal other than palm fruit. They once owned 20 goats, but now only have eight.

More than 3 million livestock have died in the Horn of Africa amid the ongoing drought, according to WFP. In Kenya alone, more than 1 million livestock deaths have been reported across several northern counties, including Turkana, "majorly as a result of starvation and diseases," according to the National Drought Management Authority's bulletin for April.

"Animals will die," Ekiro's grandmother told ABC News, "and eventually the entire family will starve."

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HEADLINE	05/11 Ukraine police build war crimes cases
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/05/11/ukraine-police-homicide-investigators-build-war-crimes-cases/
GIST	<p>TSYRKUNY, Ukraine — To get to the crime scene, the police investigators drove about 30 minutes northeast of downtown Kharkiv — past neighborhoods in ruins, destroyed Russian military vehicles, a field littered with blast craters, and plumes of dark smoke rising a few miles in the distance, where fighting between the Ukrainian and Russian militaries was ongoing.</p> <p>The Ukrainians had expelled Russian forces from the town of Tsyркuny, less than 20 miles from the Russian border, just three days earlier — part of a Ukrainian counteroffensive that has reclaimed a significant swath of territory in the Kharkiv region this month.</p>

Now the police investigators were eager to visit the village, where they had a report of two civilian bodies lying on the side of a dirt road. The women had been killed by a Russian land mine weeks earlier, the police said. And just as forensic scientists would visit the site of a killing in prewar times to collect evidence, they needed to do the same here in their quest to gather evidence of potential Russian war crimes — a process taking place across the country that led to the announcement of a first prosecution on Wednesday, a 21-year-old Russian soldier who is in custody.

The catch: The area was still covered in booby traps and tripwires rigged to land mines, and Russia's military positions were close enough that a reconnaissance drone could fly by at any moment and make everyone working on the ground a target for artillery bombardment.

It all underscored a new reality for Kharkiv and other parts of eastern Ukraine, where the war with Russia is now concentrated. Even places where Ukraine's military has made recent gains remain perilous and largely uninhabitable. Ridding them of deadly mines is a painstaking process — and there's no guarantee the Russians won't have regrouped for another offensive here by the time it's completed.

"We have to understand that the Kharkiv region will never be the same as it was before," Oleh Synyehubov, the region's governor, told The Washington Post.

"To push them all the way to the borders of the Kharkiv region, of course we're going to try to do it, but it will be extremely difficult. Why? Because at that point, they will be shooting at our troops from their territory," he said. "Right now, we're defending ourselves on our territory. But that would be a different story — it would mean attacking the Russian territory."

The Institute for the Study of War, a Washington-based think tank, [assessed](#) that the Ukrainian counteroffensive north of Kharkiv has possibly closed to within seven miles of the Russian border and "will likely continue to divert Russian troops and resources from deployment to other axes of advance where fighting has been similarly stalled out by the successful Ukrainian defense."

The analysts added that the Russians are "unlikely to launch operations to retake the northeast outskirts of Kharkiv liberated by Ukrainian forces in the near future." They said that was partly because the Russians had reportedly destroyed three bridges as part of their retreat, something armies do only when they've decided they won't try to cross in the other direction again any time soon.

Synyehubov is less optimistic. He doesn't anticipate that Russia will pull back its troops entirely, as it did in the suburbs around Kyiv and in the Chernihiv region in the north. If it did, he said, that would enable Ukraine to send more forces to strategically important Izyum, a town on the southeastern edge of Kharkiv that the Russians must capture if they plan to encircle Ukraine's military in the eastern Donbas region.

He has urged residents not to try returning to their homes in villages that were occupied by Russians until recently.

In Tsyrkuny, the military didn't even let the police in until Tuesday. Before departing for the village, Serhii Bolvinov, the head of Kharkiv's police investigation department, warned his investigators and forensic scientists: "Do not step on the grass."

"Look for wires at your feet — and higher, too," Bolvinov continued, speaking to his investigators and the Post journalists accompanying them. "Look for them in every direction. And just be very careful."

Imagine an episode of "CSI" — and there's a war going on, too. The police had a rough understanding of where the corpses were located, but just getting to them took hours as sappers — technicians who clear mines — made sure the path was safe. The booms of incoming artillery sounded closer and closer, and one soldier warned the investigators to move to somewhere less exposed — except that the only place to go was into the forest, where there was the danger of hidden explosives.

While the de-mining crew was still carefully moving detection wands through the grass and spiking them into the ground, 83-year-old Oleksandr Sahno walked by. He had spent nearly every night in a neighbor's basement during the Russian occupation. Now he was hoping to finally be reunited with his son in the city and was on his way to a meetup point.

The police asked him to stay near their car until they were finished working; they couldn't risk his running into Russian soldiers on the way and revealing their positions. Sahno reluctantly agreed.

The scariest part of living under occupation, he said, was the last three days of it, when Ukrainian forces moved closer and firefights broke out in the village. Sahno had been working in his potato garden then, and an artillery shell landed just 150 feet away. He clumsily ran for cover as the roof of a house on his street collapsed in front of him.

"I never doubted our guys would come," he said. "If anything, I didn't think it would take so long."

After nearly two hours, a safe path had been created for the forensic investigators to collect evidence around the corpses. Without touching the bodies, they took photographs, observing that the women were wearing leisurewear and didn't have any bags with them. They had probably been out for a walk when they hit a tripwire rigged to an antipersonnel mine.

The back of one woman's head had been completely blown off, and her face was charred and mangled. The bodies of two dogs were also discovered; they might have triggered a different mine later.

Placing down numbered yellow markers, the police took photos of the fragments of the two land mines they discovered, a MON-50 and POM-2. They bagged the pieces and some wire to eventually hand over to Ukraine's Security Service — evidence for future war-crimes cases. The weapons can be used to identify who committed the crimes, as can any traces of DNA on them.

Andrii Sharnin, the deputy chief of Kharkiv's police investigation department, said Ukraine is steadily creating a database of Russian soldiers' DNA — either through the Russian corpses the country has recovered or the troops it has captured.

"Eventually — whether in two days or in two years — we'll be able to determine the specific person who planted this mine," Sharnin said.

In the Sumy region north of Kharkiv, investigators collected evidence of Vadim Shishimarin allegedly firing several shots with a Kalashnikov rifle from a car and killing an unarmed 62-year-old resident in a village on Feb. 28, the Ukrainian prosecutor general said. Shishimarin will be the first Russian service member to stand trial there on a war crimes charge in the 11-week conflict.

The office said that Shishimarin's crime — violating "the laws and customs of war combined with premeditated murder" — can carry a penalty of 10 to 15 years or life in prison. The statement did not provide details on the nature of the evidence or how the Russian soldier ended up in Ukrainian custody.

Iryna Venediktova, the prosecutor general, told Ukraine's public broadcaster that said her office has opened more than 5,000 cases linked to war crimes and crimes of aggression since the invasion began.

"Shishimarin is actually physically in Ukraine," Venediktova said. "We are starting a trial not in absentia but rather directly with the person who killed a civilian."

Nervous about how long they'd already been at the site in Tsyrkuny, the investigators hurriedly packed the evidence into their van and sped back toward the city. Oleksandr Bogdanov powered on his phone for the first time in hours. He'd been the one examining the bodies closest — not that his mother needed to know the dangerous places his job takes him these days.

	“Sorry, I didn’t have good service in the bunker,” he told her in a call. “We’ve just been doing paperwork down here.”
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HEADLINE	05/11 Mariupol steel mill fighters plead for rescue
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/05/11/mariupol-fighters-ukraine-wounded-azovstal-steel-plant-photos/
GIST	<p>With swollen faces and missing limbs, Ukrainian fighters who for weeks have been defending Mariupol’s steel plant issued a desperate plea for help, seeking escape as pro-Russian forces in the city appeared to threaten an acceleration of strikes.</p> <p>The Azov Regiment, the nationalist group that is part of Ukraine’s national guard that has been defending the Azovstal plant, the last bastion of Ukraine’s defense in the shattered port city, on Tuesday shared photos of the injured fighters on its Telegram channel.</p> <p>Some are pictured with missing arms or legs, while many sit with bandaged wounds, waiting for help that might not arrive as Russian troops continue their assault.</p> <p>“The whole civilized world must see the conditions in which the wounded, crippled defenders of Mariupol are and act!” the regiment wrote in its post, adding that conditions at the plant are “completely unsanitary” and that the wounded are without access to medication and food.</p> <p>The regiment said that along with those photographed, “hundreds more” are in need of medical attention because of constant shelling from Russian forces.</p> <p>It called on the United Nations and the Red Cross to evacuate the wounded, who are being treated in makeshift hospitals at the industrial site — one of which was targeted in an airstrike Tuesday, local police said.</p> <p>An estimated 300 women and children were recently evacuated from the sprawling steel plant, after weeks spent trapped underground at the site. Some who made it out said they had spent more than a month hidden inside cold tunnels below the complex, without access to sunlight or food.</p> <p>On Tuesday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said rescue operations will be increasingly difficult as his government had tried “all possible diplomatic tools” to evacuate the remaining soldiers but Russia had not agreed to any proposals.</p> <p>Russian government-owned news agency Tass quoted the leader of the pro-Russian Donetsk separatist group in the city as saying Wednesday that its hands were “no longer tied” because civilians at the plant had been evacuated.</p> <p>Ukraine’s soldiers vowed to maintain a foothold in the city and to fight until the end, as regional police told The Washington Post that three soldiers were killed Friday during the civilian evacuation.</p> <p>There are conflicting reports about the number of remaining fighters and civilians within the plant, which before the war was one of Europe’s largest metallurgical factories, pumping out millions of tons of crude steel every year.</p> <p>Officials said Saturday that all women, children and elderly people had made it out of the plant. But Petro Andryushchenko, an aide to the Mariupol mayor, wrote Tuesday on Telegram that Russian forces continue to bombard the Azovstal Iron and Steel Works complex despite the presence of “at least” 100 civilians there.</p> <p>Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk, speaking to Agence France-Presse on Tuesday, said that more than 1,000 Ukrainian fighters, many of them injured, remain at the plant.</p>

Later that day, Police Chief Mykhailo Vershynin, who is inside the plant, disputed those figures, telling The Post that other officials' accounting of the number of civilians was wrong, without giving further details. Vershynin said there are more than 500 wounded people in the plant and that that number is increasing "every day." The Post could not independently confirm any of the estimates.

Ilya Samoilenko, an Azov lieutenant, [said](#) in an interview with Sky News on Tuesday that "words of support will not stop a bomb from collapsing our bunker," a looming threat he said could become a reality in a matter of minutes or hours.

Samoilenko, who was wearing an eye patch, said forces have held out against Russian attacks — but their "fighting capabilities are far lesser than they need right now."

His pleas came as Kateryna Prokopenko, the wife of Azov Regiment commander Denys Prokopenko, and Yulya Fedosiuk, the wife of Azov soldier Arseniy Fedosiuk, met with Pope Francis in Rome on Wednesday and asked for his help in rescuing their husbands and other soldiers from inside the steelworks, the Catholic News Service reported.

Serhiy Volyna, a commander of the 36th Separate Marine Brigade who is inside Azovstal, said in a Facebook [post](#) shared Wednesday that soldiers were willing to "give their lives for the motherland."

Last month, Volyna told The Post that fighters inside steel plant were "[dying underground](#)" and called on other nations to intervene to secure safe passage for those wanting to leave the area.

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HEADLINE	05/11 Russia sanctions severely impact military
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/05/11/russia-sanctions-effect-military/
GIST	<p>U.S.-led sanctions are forcing Russia to use computer chips from dishwashers and refrigerators in some military equipment, Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo said Wednesday.</p> <p>"We have reports from Ukrainians that when they find Russian military equipment on the ground, it's filled with semiconductors that they took out of dishwashers and refrigerators," Raimondo told a Senate hearing, noting that she recently met with Ukraine's prime minister.</p> <p>U.S. technology exports to Russia have fallen by nearly 70 percent since sanctions began in late February, according to Raimondo, whose department oversees the export controls that form a big part of the sanctions package. Three dozen other countries have adopted similar export bans, which also apply to Belarus.</p> <p>"Our approach was to deny Russia technology — technology that would cripple their ability to continue a military operation. And that is exactly what we are doing," she said in a response to a question from Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-N.H.) about the impact of the export controls.</p> <p>The semiconductor anecdote came from Ukrainian officials, who told the secretary that when they opened up captured Russian tanks, they found parts from refrigerators and commercial and industrial machinery that appear to make up for other unavailable components, Commerce Department spokeswoman Robyn Patterson said.</p> <p>The number of U.S. shipments to Russia including items subject to the new rules — semiconductors, telecommunications equipment, lasers, avionics and maritime technology — has decreased 85 percent and their value has decreased 97 percent, compared with the same time period in 2021, Patterson said.</p> <p>In her Senate remarks, Raimondo also pointed to recent reports that two Russian tank manufacturers have had to idle production because of a lack of components. The White House, too, has previously highlighted those reports, saying Uralvagonzavod and Chelyabinsk Tractor Plant have halted production.</p>

[Computer chips](#), also known as semiconductors, [are the brains](#) that operate most modern electronics, from appliances to fighter jets. Russia manufactures few of its own chips, historically relying on imports from Asian and Western companies.

The world's biggest computer chip companies [began cutting off](#) deliveries to Russia in late February, after the U.S.-led restrictions kicked in.

The United States and other Western nations already had regulated sales to Russia of chips and other electronic components specifically designed for military use. Those sales required a government license to proceed even before Russia's recent invasion of Ukraine.

The new rules tightened those restrictions and also blocked the sale of most dual-use chips, which have both military and commercial applications, to nonmilitary users in Russia, including those in high-tech industries.

The Biden administration said the ban would cut off more than half of Russia's high-tech imports and kneecap the country's ability to diversify its economy and support its military. The ban was not designed to block deliveries of consumer electronics.

In a [novel move](#) that the United States has used only once before — against [China's Huawei](#) — it is also requiring companies worldwide to abide by the rules and block such sales to Russia if they use U.S. manufacturing equipment or software to produce chips. Most chip factories around the world use software or equipment designed in the United States, analysts say.

Previous research has shown Russia's military has long relied on western electronics. Russian military drones shot down over Ukraine in recent years have been [full of Western electronics](#) and components, according to investigators from the London-based [Conflict Armament Research](#) group, which dissected the drones.

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HEADLINE	05/11 Ukraine war economic toll tests West unity
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/11/world/europe/ukraine-russia-western-solidarity.html
GIST	<p>LONDON — The West united against Russia's war on Ukraine more swiftly and solidly than almost anyone had expected. But as the war settles into a prolonged conflict, one that could rumble on for months or even years, it is testing the resolve of Western countries, with European and American officials questioning whether the rising economic toll will erode their solidarity over time.</p> <p>So far, the fissures are mostly superficial: Hungary's refusal to sign on to an embargo of Russian oil, thwarting the European Union's effort to impose a continentwide ban; restiveness in Paris with the Biden administration's aggressive goal of militarily weakening the Russian president, Vladimir V. Putin; a beleaguered President Biden blaming sky-high food and gas prices on a Putin price hike.</p> <p>Alongside those tensions, there are further signs of solidarity: Finland and Sweden on Wednesday edged closer to joining NATO, with Britain offering both countries security assurances to gird against the Russian threat. In Washington, the House voted 368 to 57 on Tuesday in favor of a nearly \$40 billion aid package for Ukraine.</p> <p>Yet Russia's tanks rolled across the Ukrainian frontier just 76 days ago, the blink of an eye in the scheme of history's forever wars. As the fighting grinds on, the cascading effect on supply chains, energy pipelines and agricultural harvests will be felt more acutely at gas pumps and on supermarket shelves.</p> <p>Mr. Putin, some experts say, is calculating that the West will tire before Russia does of a long twilight struggle for Ukraine's contested Donbas region, especially if the price for the West's continued support is turbocharged inflation rates, energy disruptions, depleted public finances and fatigued populations.</p>

The Biden administration's director of national intelligence, Avril D. Haines, crystallized those doubts on Tuesday, warning senators that Mr. Putin was digging in for a long siege and "probably counting on U.S. and E.U. resolve to weaken as food shortages, inflation and energy shortages get worse."

On Wednesday, Mr. Biden traveled to a farm in Kankakee, Ill., to make the case that Mr. Putin's war was to blame for food shortages and the cost-of-living squeeze on American families, a tacit sign that his steadfast support for Ukraine — a policy that has won bipartisan support in Washington — could carry a political cost.

Mr. Putin faces his own domestic pressures, which were evident in the calibrated tone he struck during a speech in Moscow's Red Square on Monday, neither calling for a mass mobilization nor threatening to escalate the conflict. But he also made clear that there was no end in sight for what he falsely called Russia's campaign to rid its neighbor of "torturers, death squads and Nazis."

On the ground in Ukraine, the fighting shows signs of becoming a protracted battle. A day after Ukraine's counteroffensive unseated Russian forces from a cluster of towns northeast of the city of Kharkiv, the region's governor said on Wednesday that the Ukrainian efforts had driven Moscow's forces "even further" from the city, giving them "even less opportunity to fire on the regional center."

Ukraine's apparent success at pushing back Russian troops outside Kharkiv — its second largest city, about 20 miles from the Russian border — appears to have contributed to reduced shelling there in recent days, even as Russia makes advances along parts of the front line in the Donbas region in eastern Ukraine.

That Ukraine would even find itself in an ongoing pitched battle, nearly three months after Russia launched a full-scale invasion, is remarkable. Analysts pointed out that a prolonged war would stretch the resources of a Russian military that has already suffered heavy losses of men and machinery. Given that, some argue that the West should press its advantage by tightening the economic chokehold on Moscow.

"I worry about Western fatigue," said Michael A. McFaul, a former American ambassador to Russia, "which is why the leaders of the free world should do more now to hasten the end of the war."

The United States and the European Union, he said, should impose a full range of crippling sanctions immediately, rather than rolling them out in escalating waves, as they have so far. Western countries had come close to such an all-in strategy with military aid, he said, which had helped the Ukrainians hold off the Russians.

But the halting negotiations on a European oil embargo show the limits of that approach when it comes to Russian energy supplies. European Union ambassadors held another fruitless meeting in Brussels on Wednesday, failing to break the fierce resistance of a single member of the bloc, Hungary.

Prime Minister Viktor Orban of Hungary, who has a warm relationship with Mr. Putin and has been at odds with Brussels, threw hopes for a show of unity into disarray when he blocked the latest measure, arguing that a ban on Russian oil would be the equivalent of an "atomic bomb" for the Hungarian economy.

Mr. Orban has continued to resist, even after concessions that would give Hungary more time to wean itself off Russian oil and intense lobbying by other leaders. Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission, flew to Budapest to try to sway him while President Emmanuel Macron telephoned him.

"We will only support this proposal if Brussels proposes a solution for the problem that Brussels created," Hungary's foreign minister, Peter Szijjarto, said, adding that modernizing Hungary's energy sector would cost "many, many billions of euros."

In Washington, Mr. Biden has encountered less trouble rounding up support for military and humanitarian aid to Ukraine. The House vote in favor of a massive aid package showed how the war's brutality had overcome resistance from both the right and left to American involvement in military conflicts overseas.

And yet rising food and fuel prices, which are aggravated by the war, pose a genuine threat to Mr. Biden. The price of food rose 0.9 percent in April from the previous month, according to data released on Wednesday. Treasury Secretary Janet L. Yellen said the administration was "terribly concerned about global food supplies," adding that 275 million people around the world face starvation.

"Putin's war has cut off critical sources of food," Mr. Biden said to farmers in Illinois. "Our farmers are helping on both fronts, reducing the price of food at home and expanding production and feeding the world in need."

It remains to be seen whether the United States can increase agricultural production enough to ease the shortages. But the visit to a farm came as Mr. Biden, under pressure over the fastest pace of inflation in 40 years, tried to reassure Americans that the White House is taking price increases seriously.

While Mr. Putin faces arguably much greater pressures — from swelling combat casualties to the economic pain caused by sanctions — he is exploiting nationalist feelings, which some analysts note will give him staying power.

The Kremlin signaled on Wednesday that it could annex the strategically important southern Ukrainian region of Kherson, as the occupying authorities said they would prepare a formal request to Mr. Putin to absorb their region into Russia.

"They are motivated by powerful nationalism," said Francis Fukuyama, a political scientist at Stanford University, "for which they are willing to undergo extraordinary economic damage." Still, he added, the West's muscular response could be "a moment of turnaround in the self-confidence of democracies."

For some Europeans, the United States might be going too far. French diplomats with ties to Mr. Macron described the evolving American policy as essentially arming Ukraine to the hilt and maintaining sanctions on Russia indefinitely. France, they said, wants to push hard for negotiations with Mr. Putin because there was no other path to lasting European security.

Other analysts argue that the threats to Western unity are overdone. The moves by Finland and Sweden to join NATO suggest not only that the alliance is pulling together but also that its center of gravity is shifting eastward.

Even before he invaded Ukraine, Mr. Putin warned those countries that they would face "retaliation" if they joined NATO. On a visit to Stockholm, Prime Minister Boris Johnson suggested that the mutual security declaration Britain signed with Sweden — under which both countries pledged come to each other's aid if they face a military threat or natural disaster — would counter that threat.

"Sovereign nations must be free to make those decisions without fear or influence or threat of retaliation," Mr. Johnson said, alongside Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson of Sweden. The declaration "will allow us to share more intelligence, bolster our military exercises and further our joint development of technology," he said.

Despite Germany's ambivalence about cutting off Russian gas, it seems highly unlikely to reverse course from its landmark commitment to increase military spending. On Wednesday, Germany started training the first class of Ukrainian gun crews on the use of self-propelled howitzers in western Germany. The German military plans to donate seven of the heavy weapons to Ukraine.

"The Russians, because of their barbarity, keep on generating images and news that will help the cause of Western unity," said Eliot A. Cohen, a political scientist who served in the State Department during the

	George W. Bush administration. “If the Ukrainians continue to succeed, I think people will cheer them on.”
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HEADLINE	05/11 Ukraine: Russian soldier war crimes trial
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/11/world/europe/russia-war-crimes-trial-ukraine.html
GIST	<p>A 21-year-old Russian soldier accused of shooting a civilian on a bicycle and leaving him dead on the side of the road will be the first Russian service member to stand trial in Ukraine for war crimes since the invasion, Ukraine’s prosecutor general said on Wednesday.</p> <p>The soldier is in Ukrainian custody and was identified by the prosecutor general, Iryna Venediktova, as Sgt. Vadim Shysimarin. According to Ms. Venediktova, this is what Ukraine’s intelligence agency, the S.B.U., found in its investigation:</p> <p>On Feb. 28, four days into Russia’s invasion, Sergeant Shysimarin and four other servicemen stole a car at gunpoint while fleeing Ukrainian forces and drove into the village of Chupakhivka in the Sumy region, about 200 miles east of Kyiv. There they saw an unarmed 62-year-old resident biking on the roadside and talking on the phone.</p> <p>Sergeant Shysimarin was ordered to kill the man so he would not report them. He fired a Kalashnikov rifle out of the car window at the man’s head and killed him on the spot, just a few dozen yards from his home. Sergeant Shysimarin faces 10 to 15 years in prison. It was not immediately clear how he came to be in custody or when the landmark trial may begin.</p> <p>Both Ukrainian and international investigators have undertaken vast efforts to document evidence of potential war crimes in areas where Russian forces have retreated. Hundreds of bodies have been recovered for forensic examination, and U.N. officials are rushing more resources to the Ukrainian authorities to help prosecute growing reports of rape by Russian soldiers.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/11 India dangerous pattern communal tensions
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/11/world/asia/india-hindu-muslim-violence.html
GIST	<p>KHARGONE, India — The authorities sent bulldozers to the small city in central India within 24 hours of clashes between Hindus and Muslims that turned into a mob-fueled rampage.</p> <p>The Hindus said stones had been thrown from the direction of the mosque, where Muslims were breaking the Ramadan fast. The Muslims said the Hindu procession had moved toward them with provocative chants.</p> <p>Before any official investigation or court ruling, the home minister of the state, Madhya Pradesh, appeared to fault the Muslims and ordered demolitions — the same swift, one-sided punishments imposed in two other states over recent clashes. “The houses from where the stones were pelted, we will turn those houses into piles of stone,” said Narottam Mishra, the home minister.</p> <p>The communal tensions in Khargone, New Delhi and Gujarat — and the demolitions that followed in each — are part of a worrisome new pattern, according to analysts, activists and former civil servants.</p> <p>In the past, such clashes, while often deadlier, were usually set off by a local issue and would remain contained to a single area. The trigger for the 2002 Gujarat riots, which left more than 1,000 dead, was a train fire that killed dozens of Hindu pilgrims.</p> <p>The recent violence, the most widespread communal tensions in recent years, played out across several states, multiple clashes with the same characteristics and one-sided punishments. And they are rooted in the rhetoric of right-wing groups at the national level that are targeting Muslims through provocation, a campaign emboldened by the silence of the country’s top leaders.</p>

The concern, say analysts, activists, and former civil servants, is that the clashes will become more frequent, pushing the nation into a [cycle of violence and instability](#).

The nationwide provocations by right-wing activists, which spread swiftly through social media, inspire local groups, who are increasingly turning religious occasions into political events promoting a Hindu-first vision of India that relegates minorities to second-class citizens. When the recent tensions spilled into violence last month, authorities in those places rushed to dole out punishment that fell disproportionately on Muslims and in ways that circumvented the legal process.

After clashes in New Delhi, demolition, mainly of Muslim-run shops and kiosks, continued for nearly two hours after India's chief justice issued an order to halt. Bulldozers swooped up tea stalls and ripped out staircases that left a family stranded without a way down. They destroyed the walls of a mosque before stopping short of a nearby Hindu temple.

Officials in the three states justified the razing, saying that they were going after illegal encroachment. But the timing, along with speeches by local politicians calling for the demolitions, suggested a link to the clashes, activists and analysts say.

"I fear that we are in the stage of perpetual violence," said Asim Ali, a researcher who has studied the rise of Hindu nationalism, known as Hindutva.

"Social media and 24/7 news channels mean that Hindutva groups, which are now very technologically savvy, graft into the local context any hot-button communal issue that takes place anywhere in the country," he said.

In an open letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, more than a hundred retired senior civil servants called for an end to hate and "vigilante violence" that they said had "embedded itself deep in the recesses of the structures, institutions and processes of governance."

"The administration of law, instead of being an instrument for maintaining peace and harmony, has become the means by which the minorities can be kept in a state of perpetual fear," they said.

Another group of retired officials countered with a letter in support of Mr. Modi, calling the concerns "empty virtue-signaling."

"What do you mean by provocation?" said Vinod Bansal, a spokesman for Vishwa Hindu Parishad, a right-wing group behind some of the recent processions.

"These are false allegations levied by the perpetrators to save their skins and hide their sins," he added. "Hindus are in fact victims in all such cases."

Khargone, a town of about 200,000 in Madhya Pradesh state where the worst of the communal violence happened on April 10, has a history of small-scale tensions. About three-quarters of the population is Hindu; in many neighborhoods, Hindus and Muslims share the same streets.

Like other recent clashes, the Khargone violence centered on the birthday celebrations of a Hindu god, which overlapped with Ramadan this year.

One procession ended peacefully. Authorities approved a second on a designated route to avoid the mosque at its busiest hour when Muslims gather to break their Ramadan fast. But that procession, which included hundreds of participants, took place later, at peak time.

Among the chants repeated was one heard across other states, too: "If you are to live in this country, you have to hail Lord Ram."

Anil Gupta, an organizer, said the delay was unintentional, caused by participants' late arrival. "We did not play any provocative music or songs," he said. "To take the name of Lord Ram is not a crime."

Violence erupted. Mobs rampaged for much of the night, destroying property from both communities. Altogether 73 people, including the region's senior most police officer, were injured.

The police returned the body of a Muslim man to his family days later, with little explanation of how he died. After about a week, the police said they had arrested several Hindu men in connection with his death.

An inquiry by a group of opposition parties contended that the police had initially withheld the victim's identity so as to justify the government's heavy-handed response to Muslims.

In the past, officials and religious leaders put in place measures to avoid flare-ups, like assigning members to keep watch at sensitive spots. Such steps broke down in Khargone.

Madan Lokur, a retired justice on India's Supreme Court, said the police typically tried to forestall violence by garnering intelligence on potential trouble. Not doing so, he said, "will only embolden the aggressors."

"I see these events as a disturbing pattern which will lead, eventually, to injustice and further vitiate the atmosphere prevailing in some parts of the country and stoke fires and retaliation," Mr. Lokur said.

Concerns about the fairness of India's law enforcement in dealing with communal tensions have intensified in recent years.

An Amnesty International report found that after months of peaceful protests against a citizenship law seen as discriminatory toward Muslims turned violent in 2020, the police in New Delhi arrested "Muslims on a mass scale immediately after the riots even though the minority community bore the brunt of the violence" and accused officers of "torturing people."

"If you try to defend yourself, the police will come for you with its full might," said Mehmood Pracha, a lawyer who represented several Muslims accused in the 2020 riots.

The Delhi High court, in a recent hearing, raised questions about why the police had not stopped a procession by a right-wing group that had led to the clashes in April. Instead, the court said, the police "were accompanying the said illegal procession."

Suman Nalwa, a spokeswoman for the New Delhi police, denied the accusations around the 2020 riots and rejected concerns over the April clashes.

"The rhetoric and narrative against police is created by interested groups who want to vilify the police," she said.

In Madhya Pradesh state, where Khargone is, political leaders have taken a hard line on issues embraced by Hindu nationalist campaigns. Shivraj Singh Chouhan, the state's chief minister, has supported cow protection and condemned interfaith relationships.

"If anyone looks the wrong way toward any mother, sister and daughter, I will not only send you to jail but will destroy your life, your house, your shop — nothing will be left," he said in a recent speech.

Officials have followed his lead. After a complaint last month by relatives of a Hindu woman, alleging that a Muslim man had "kidnapped" her, a senior district official retweeted Mr. Chouhan's speech. The official then tweeted pictures of bulldozers demolishing a shop and house of the man "accused in the kidnapping of a girl student."

A local court later ordered protection for the couple, describing them as “living together as per their own free will.”

In the days after the Khargone clashes, nearly 150 people were arrested. Riyajuddin Sheikh, a local Muslim social worker, said community leaders compiled lists showing about 125 of the arrested were Muslim. Among the dozens of homes and shops destroyed by bulldozers, the majority belonged to Muslims.

Anugraha P., the district magistrate in Khargone, denied the authorities had unfairly targeted Muslims or the police had done too little to prevent the clashes. “We have to ensure neutrality, and give a message to the people that hatred and fear should not be there,” she said.

Hasina Fakhroo, a 56-year-old widow and mother of six whose house was razed, said the authorities “took out their anger” through collective punishment. She said that no stones had been thrown from her home or the immediate area.

She provided documents to The New York Times showing that she paid property taxes and that her home’s construction was partly funded by a plan the prime minister had championed. But Ms. Fakhroo said she had been receiving notices that the house was on illegally occupied land.

“I shouted ‘Allow me to die here, run the bulldozer over me, where will I go? I am a widow,’” Ms. Fakhroo recalled of the demolition.

The tensions are prompting some to abandon the area.

“My in-laws are pressuring me that we should leave this place,” said Rakesh Kale, a Hindu resident who has painted a “For Sale” sign on his wall.

“How we can live here?” he asked “Violence took place in 2012, 2015, 2018 and now in 2022.”

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HEADLINE	05/11 Bulgaria takes a stand against Russia
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/11/world/europe/bulgaria-russia-ukraine.html
GIST	<p>SHIPKA, Bulgaria — A week after Russia invaded Ukraine, Moscow’s ambassador to Bulgaria climbed a snowy mountain pass to honor czarist-era Russian soldiers who died there fighting for Bulgarian independence in the 19th century.</p> <p>Present day concerns, however, quickly eclipsed the effort to remind Bulgaria of the debt it owed Russia. That same day, Bulgaria expelled two of the ambassador’s underlings for espionage and announced the arrest of a senior military officer on charges of spying for Russia.</p> <p>In the weeks since, Bulgaria, a country that Moscow long counted as its most ardent and reliable friend in Europe, has joined fellow members of the European Union in imposing ever tougher economic sanctions on Russia, offered to repair broken military helicopters and tanks for Ukraine, and expelled yet more Russian diplomats.</p> <p>“Traditionally, Russia has always had a big influence here, but we have been a big surprise to them,” Prime Minister Kiril Petkov said in an interview last week in Sofia, the Bulgarian capital. “They don’t understand what happened,” he added.</p> <p>The rapid souring of relations with Bulgaria, a poor but symbolically important country because of its historically close ties to Russia, underscores how far off-script the invasion of Ukraine ordered by President Vladimir V. Putin has veered, and not only on the battlefield.</p>

Russia, furious at what it sees as its wayward friend's insolence, last month abruptly halted supplies of natural gas to Bulgaria by Gazprom, making its erstwhile Balkan ally the [first country along with Poland targeted by Moscow's energy weapon](#).

At the same time, Mr. Petkov said, Moscow launched cyberattacks, assaulting the server of Bulgaria's state energy company and crippling pension payments by its postal service. "We are under severe attack at the moment," he said, describing this as a clear "attempt to derail our government" by stoking domestic unrest.

"They are trying to make an example of us," Mr. Petkov said, describing Russia's energy squeeze on his country as aimed at creating a situation in which "energy prices will go through the roof and our government will fall."

Whether Mr. Petkov's already fragile coalition government, formed after inconclusive elections in November, survives now depends to a large extent on its ability to patch together alternative sources of energy with help from the European Union, which Bulgaria joined in 2007, and the United States. Mr. Petkov this week visited Washington, where Vice President Kamala Harris pledged U.S. "solidarity in the face of Russia's latest attempt to use energy as a weapon."

Assen Vassilev, Bulgaria's finance minister and deputy prime minister, insisted that Bulgaria was already well on its way to securing substitute supplies of gas by pipeline from Azerbaijan and through deliveries by sea of liquefied natural gas to terminals in neighboring Greece for transport north to Bulgaria.

"For us, obviously, Gazprom is now in the past," Mr. Vassilev said in an interview. Moscow, he added, had overplayed its hand, prodding normally feuding Balkan nations into fast joint action to counter the danger of Russia suddenly cutting off supplies.

"This," he said, "gives me a lot of hope that the gas weapon will be not only a paper tiger but will backfire."

Already clear from Russia's rift with Bulgaria is that its faltering progress on the battlefield in Ukraine has been accompanied by often self-inflicted setbacks on the diplomatic front.

Moscow has kept China onside and rallied support in Africa and parts of Latin America, but elsewhere it has displayed a striking capacity to lose friends and alienate people.

Russia's foreign minister, Sergey V. Lavrov, for example, recently infuriated many people in Israel, a country that had mostly sat on the fence over the war in Ukraine, by claiming that Jews were "the biggest anti-Semites" and that Hitler had Jewish origins. President Putin later apologized to Israel for the remarks.

The Russian ambassador in Sofia, Eleonora Mitrofanova, scored another own-goal by describing Bulgaria as America's "bedpan," an insult that her embassy later blamed on a faulty translation.

Mr. Petkov, the Bulgarian prime minister, said he had summoned the ambassador to protest her remark, telling her that "there are lots of good dictionaries around," and received an apology.

He added that he was still unhappy that Moscow's envoy was "acting not like a diplomat but a propaganda machine."

Bulgaria in March recalled its ambassador from Moscow in response to what it described as "undiplomatic, sharp, and rude" statements by Ms. Mitrofanova. It has let the Russian ambassador stay in Sofia, but more of her diplomats will soon be ordered home.

"Now is the time to take a strong stand against Russian spies and operatives," Mr. Petkov said. "Now is the time to clean up."

Poland, while never a friend of Moscow like Bulgaria had been, has also been taken aback by Russia's disregard for public sentiment. Russia's embassy in Warsaw, a city awash with Ukrainian flags and abusive billboards targeting Mr. Putin, last week called on residents of the Polish capital to join Russian diplomats in "Victory Day" events on May 9 celebrating the 1945 defeat of Nazi Germany, a Russian holiday that Mr. Putin has turned into a festival of nationalist bombast.

On Saturday, after a public outcry over what many in Poland saw as a crude effort to hijack memories of World War II, the embassy canceled its plans for joint public events with Poles. In a statement, the embassy also expressed regret over Poland's ingratitude to Moscow for its role in defeating the Nazis, "thanks to which the Polish state exists today!" When the Russian ambassador showed up at Soviet war memorial in Warsaw on Monday, a Ukrainian activist doused him with a red liquid.

Moscow's embassy in Sofia made an equally unsuccessful attempt to co-opt Russia's past military glory in service of its brutal onslaught against Ukraine. Ms. Mitrofanova, the ambassador, infuriated even previously pro-Russian Bulgarians with a claim that Russia's invasion of Ukraine was no different from its czarist-era military intervention against the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans, which helped Bulgaria become an independent nation.

"There were times when Russia liberated Bulgaria, now it's time for Russia to liberate Donetsk and Lugansk," the ambassador, referring to two eastern regions of Ukraine, said in a March speech.

That comparison, said Daniela Koleva, a historian at Sofia University, "caused a wave of indignation" by presenting a one-sided view of history that, like Mr. Putin's denigration of Ukraine's history and its right to exist, distorted complicated past events in service of clumsy propaganda.

Ms. Koleva said many Bulgarians acknowledged that their country had benefited from Russian help in the 19th century and still felt some gratitude. But, she added, the country also has bitter, more recent memories of Russian attacks on its Black Sea coast during World War I and of Soviet occupation after World War II.

"There is a lot of mythology about Russia," she said, adding that more than four decades of Soviet-imposed communist rule had "systematically erased anything that might put a shadow on Russia or the Soviet Union."

Opinion polls show that sympathy for Russia is still stronger in Bulgaria than elsewhere in Europe. But, according to a survey commissioned by Bulgarian state television in March, more than 60 percent favor tougher sanctions against Moscow while the approval rating of Mr. Putin has more than halved to around 25 percent since he invaded Ukraine.

"This war is a big nail in the coffin of our enchantment with Russia," said Ruslan Stefanov, program director for the Center for the Study of Democracy, a research organization in Sofia. "They have been very successful in totally turning people off Russia."

When the government submitted a resolution in Parliament last week authorizing "military-technical assistance" to Ukraine, even the Socialist Party, long a stalwart supporter of Russia, voted in favor. The only party that voted against was Revival, a nationalist outfit that has staged regular protests in support of Russia's invasion.

Kostadin Kostadinov, the leader of Revival, insisted in an interview that most Bulgarians supported Russia but had been ignored by a government that he accused of turning the country into an "entirely dependent colony of the United States."

Halting gas deliveries to Bulgaria, he acknowledged, "is not a friendly act" by Russia but one that he said he understood because "we started this war with Russia" by imposing sanctions and expelling diplomats.

	<p>Until Gazprom abruptly cut off Bulgaria in late April, the country relied on Russia for about 90 percent of the natural gas it consumed.</p> <p>But, according to Mr. Petkov, the prime minister, Russia gravely miscalculated by turning Bulgaria into a test of its ability to inflict economic damage and alter government policy in support of Ukraine.</p> <p>“If the most Russia dependent country with the lowest per capita G.D.P. in the E.U. can afford to stand up to Putin, everybody should be able to stand up to Putin,” he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/11 CPI still uncomfortable rapid pace
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/11/business/economy/april-2022-cpi.html
GIST	<p>The pressures that have kept inflation elevated for months remain strong, fresh data released Wednesday showed, a challenge for households that are trying to shoulder rising expenses and for the White House and Federal Reserve as they try to put the economy on a steadier path.</p> <p>Annual inflation moderated for the first time in months in April, but the Consumer Price Index still increased 8.3 percent, an uncomfortably rapid pace. At the same time, a closely watched measure that subtracts food and fuel costs actually accelerated.</p> <p>Core inflation — which excludes costs for groceries and gas — picked up 0.6 percent in April from the prior month, faster than its 0.3 percent increase in March. That measure is particularly important for policymakers, who use it as a gauge to help determine where inflation is headed.</p> <p>While the letup in annual inflation may have given President Biden and the Fed a dose of comfort, the overall picture remains worrying. Policymakers have a long way to go to bring price increases down to more normal and stable levels, and the newest data is likely to keep them focused on trying to slow an inflation rate that remains near its fastest pace in 40 years.</p> <p>“Inflation is too high — they need to bring it down,” said Laura Rosner-Warburton, senior economist at MacroPolicy Perspectives. “The re-acceleration in core inflation is unwelcome.”</p> <p>The report renewed fears among investors that the Fed could speed up plans to raise interest rates, which would further take steam out of the stock market. The S&P 500 fell 1.6 percent, extending a five-week slide that has taken it to the cusp of a so-called bear market — a drop of more than 20 percent from a recent peak. At the close of trading, the index was 18 percent below its January record high. The tech-heavy Nasdaq composite, which has been in a bear market for months, fell 3.2 percent.</p> <p>Annual inflation may have now peaked, having climbed by an even-quicker 8.5 percent in March. It slowed down in April partly because gas prices dropped lower, and partly because of a statistical quirk that will continue through the months ahead. Yearly price changes are now being measured against elevated price readings from last spring, when inflation started to take off. The higher base makes annual increases look less severe.</p> <p>Still, even the White House greeted the new report with concern.</p> <p>“While it is heartening to see that annual inflation moderated in April, the fact remains that inflation is unacceptably high,” Mr. Biden said in a statement. “Inflation is a challenge for families across the country, and bringing it down is my top economic priority.”</p> <p>Economists do expect price increases to continue to ebb somewhat this year, because they think that consumer demand will taper off and that supply chain stresses will ease. The crucial question is how much and how quickly that moderation might happen.</p>

Many analysts have been predicting a slowdown in price increases or even outright price cuts on many goods, but those forecasts look increasingly uncertain. Lockdowns in China and the war in Ukraine threaten to exacerbate supply shortages for semiconductor chips, commodities and other important products.

“There are persistent issues in supply chains,” said Matthew Luzzetti, chief U.S. economist at Deutsche Bank. “And the most recent developments have not been positive.”

The path ahead for the car market, for instance, remains unclear. Supply shortfalls for used vehicles show some signs of easing, but shortfalls persist in computer chips, which are crucial to automobile production. As a result, companies are still struggling to complete vehicles.

Prices for used cars and trucks declined in April from the prior month, though the drop was smaller than the one in March. While car parts had become cheaper in March, they resumed their monthly increase in April. New car prices also accelerated after a lull, climbing 1.7 percent from the prior month.

And services prices are now increasing quickly, as rents climb and as worker shortfalls lead to higher wages and steeper prices for restaurant meals and other labor-intensive purchases. If that continues, it could keep inflation elevated even as supply problems are resolved.

Rents picked up by 0.6 percent in April from March, and a measure of housing costs that uses rents to estimate the cost of owned housing climbed 0.5 percent, up from 0.4 percent the prior month. The pickup in housing costs is particularly important, because they make up about a third of the overall inflation index.

“Domestically generated inflationary pressures remain strong,” Andrew Hunter, senior U.S. economist at Capital Economics, wrote after the report was released.

Part of the increase in core inflation in April owed to trends that should not last, most notably a big pop in airfares as travel demand surges after the latest wave of the coronavirus. Even so, Ms. Rosner-Warburton said she expected annual C.P.I. inflation to remain 5.1 percent at the end of the year, far above levels that prevailed before the pandemic.

The Fed aims for 2 percent annual inflation on average, though it defines that goal using a related but different measure that tends to run slightly lower and comes out with more of a delay. That inflation index picked up by 6.6 percent over the year through March, and April figures will be released later this month.

The fact that high inflation is lasting so long is a problem for the central bank. After a full year of unusually swift increases, household and investor expectations for future price changes have been creeping higher, which could perpetuate inflation if households and businesses adjust their behavior, asking for bigger raises and charging more for goods and services.

As such risks have mounted, the Fed has begun to lift interest rates to try to keep price increases from galloping out of control in a more lasting way. In March, Fed policymakers lifted their main policy interest rate for the first time since 2018, then followed that up with the biggest increase since 2000 at their meeting last week.

By making it more expensive to borrow money, officials hope to weaken spending and hiring, which could help supply to catch up with demand. As the economy returns to balance, inflation should come down.

Central bankers are hoping that their policies will temper economic growth without pushing unemployment up or plunging America into a recession — engineering what they often call a “soft landing.”

“I really want us to have that be the outcome, but I recognize that it’s not going to be easy to do,” Raphael Bostic, the president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, said in an interview on Monday.

Officials have roundly acknowledged that letting the economy down gently will be difficult, and some have suggested that they would be willing to inflict economic pain if that was what it took to tackle high inflation.

If the economy gets to a point where unemployment begins climbing but inflation remains “unacceptably high,” Mr. Bostic said, price increases will be “the threat that we have to take on board.”

One challenge for policymakers — and even more for families — is that price increases are surfacing in essentials. Food costs rose 0.9 percent in April from the previous month, the 17th consecutive monthly increase, Wednesday’s report showed.

The increase was driven by dairy, nonalcoholic beverages and a 10.3 percent monthly increase in the cost of eggs, as avian flu decimated poultry flocks. Such inflation tends to especially hit the poor, who spend a bigger chunk of their budgets on needs like groceries and gas.

But as Americans see strong job gains and strong wage growth — albeit not strong enough to fully counteract inflation — many are managing to shoulder the rising costs for now, keeping overall demand strong.

“Consumers appear willing to accept the higher menu prices, particularly as inflation is broad,” George Holm, chief executive officer at the food distributor and restaurant supplier Performance Food Group, said on an earnings call Wednesday. “Still, this is something to closely monitor across the next few months and quarters.”

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HEADLINE	05/11 Eastern Ukraine fighters in trench combat
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/11/world/europe/russia-ukraine-fighting-east.html
GIST	<p>The impact of a tank round cracked the bunker’s plaster roof and sent uniformed men scrambling. Flak jackets and helmets were flung on and automatic weapons cocked. Amid a crescendo of machine gun fire, a tall soldier slung an anti-tank missile launcher over one shoulder and took a slow drag on his cigarette.</p> <p>The Russians were close.</p> <p>Fighting in eastern Ukraine has mostly occurred at a distance, with Ukrainian and Russian forces lobbing artillery shells at one another, sometimes from dozens of miles away. But at some points along the zigzagging eastern front, the combat becomes a vicious and intimate dance, granting enemy forces fleeting glimpses of one another as they jockey for command of hills and makeshift redoubts in towns and villages blasted apart by shells.</p> <p>On Wednesday, one such dance played out as a Russian unit of about 10 men entered the village where soldiers from a Ukrainian contingent, the Carpathian Sich Battalion, had dug in. In all likelihood, the Russian troops were there to identify targets for incoming tank fire, including the round that jolted the Ukrainian soldiers into action. Ukrainian forces spotted the Russian soldiers and opened fire, pushing them back.</p> <p>“It was a sabotage group, intelligence,” said a 30-year-old fighter with the call sign Warsaw, panting after the brief firefight. “Our guys were not asleep and reacted quickly, forcing the enemy to flee.”</p> <p>So it goes every day, every hour, for the fighters of the Carpathian Sich Battalion, a volunteer unit named for the army of a short-lived independent Ukrainian state created just before World War II. Attached to the Ukrainian Army’s 93rd Mechanized Brigade, the battalion is deployed along a line of villages and trenched farmland in the Kharkiv region, assigned the task of holding back Russian forces pushing down from their stronghold in the occupied Ukrainian city of Izium.</p>

The battalion gave a reporter and a photographer with The New York Times permission to visit a frontline position on condition that the precise location of their base not be revealed. Most soldiers agreed to identify themselves only by their call signs.

They have not faced an easy fight.

The Russian military has deployed an enormous force along this front in eastern Ukraine, bringing to bear its overwhelming superiority in tanks, warplanes, helicopters and heavy artillery.

The war machines rarely remain quiet for long. Tanks in particular have become a serious menace, fighters said, often coming within a mile of the battalion's positions and wreaking absolute havoc. Already this month, 13 soldiers with the battalion have been killed and more than 60 wounded.

"It's a completely different war than I've seen in places like Afghanistan or Iraq," said a colonel who called himself Mikhailo. "It's heavy fighting. Nobody cares about the law of war. They shell little towns, use prohibited artillery."

Many of the battalion's soldiers had experience in the eight-year war against Russian-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine, and had seen fighting in some of the conflict's most intense battles. But most had been settled into civilian life for years.

One tall, bearded soldier with the call sign Rusin owns a business selling bathtubs in the mountainous region of Transcarpathia, in western Ukraine. But when Russia invaded on Feb. 24, he quickly married his girlfriend — he said he wanted someone waiting for him back home — and headed to war filled with a sense of mission.

"We understand that this is not a war between Ukraine and Russia," he said. "This is a war of the pure and the light that exists on this earth, and darkness. Either we stop this horde and the world gets better, or the world is filled with the anarchy that occurs wherever there is war."

Fighters from the battalion have taken up temporary residence in an underground warren beneath a building now perforated by artillery shells. The guns and ammunition boxes piled in corners are coated in the plaster dust that rains down each time a shell strikes nearby.

Other than soldiers, the bunker is inhabited by a menagerie of animals who have also sought safety from the bombs — several small dogs and a black goat that likes to make a mess of the kitchen area. On Wednesday, Chevron, a very large German shepherd, was sleeping in front of a stack of American-made Javelin missile launchers, already out of their cases and ready to shoot.

The entire region rumbles with war. Low flying Mi-8 attack helicopters share the skies with fighter jets that streak across the countryside, occasionally setting off fires in the farm fields when they shoot flares to divert heat-seeking missiles.

The unit's drone operator is Oleksandr Kovalenko, one of the few without a rifle. While his task is to help his comrades aim their artillery at Russian positions, he approaches his work like an artist, occasionally snapping and saving photos if the balance of light and shadow in the frame is to his liking.

He shows off an overhead shot of the surrounding farmland. It is verdant with spring growth, but pock marked like the moon from artillery strikes. As he scans the landscape, a patch of trees where Russian forces are positioned suddenly erupts in a fireball that dissipates into a mushroom cloud.

The battalion is a hodgepodge, with fighters from all over Ukraine and the world. There is Matej Prokes, a wispy 18-year-old from the Czech Republic who has "Born to Kill Russians" scrawled on the side of his helmet, but admitted somewhat bashfully that he had yet to do any shooting. Elman Imanov, 41, from Azerbaijan, was moved to fight against Russia after seeing the atrocities committed against noncombatants in Ukraine.

"I pulled a four-month-old child from a nine-floor apartment with my own hands," he said, a rack of gold teeth glinting in the harsh florescent light. "I'll never be able to forget that and will never be able to forgive. He had never seen anything. What was he guilty of?"

And then there is a 47-year-old soldier with the call sign Prapor, who is exotic even by the battalion's standards. Born in Siberia, Prapor had a full career in the Russian military before retiring in the early 2000s, though he would not say where he fought. He joined the Ukrainian forces when Russian troops began shelling Kyiv.

"What can I say, they have studied well," he said. "But the fact that they have begun killing peaceful civilians, looting, this is indecent."

The battalion's commander, Oleg Kutsin, said this diversity is part of his contingent's ethos. When the original Carpathian Sich was founded in the 1930s, it welcomed anyone willing to fight and die under the blue and gold banner of an independent Ukraine, he said.

Not only are virtually any troops welcome, but equipment is as well, he said. In addition to the Javelins, troops fighting in the area recently received another gift to help them even the playing field: American-made M777 howitzers, a long-range artillery piece that the Ukrainians have been desperate to put into action.

"We wanted to resurrect this military tradition of the Ukrainian forces," he said in his unit's command center, where a desk was covered in maps of the region and a flat-screen television showed live footage of the smoky battlefield.

"They come," he said, "we give them weapons and point them in the direction of the enemy."

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HEADLINE	05/11 Census inadequate background checks
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/census-2020-us-bureau-2ed7e10195c78b64f8fe2d9204276a67
GIST	<p>The U.S. Census Bureau has a backlog of cases involving workers who were flagged for problems in their background checks and inadequate oversight allowed a handful of people who previously had faced criminal charges to be hired for the 2020 census, according to a new report from the bureau's watchdog agency.</p> <p>Nearly 7.5% of the hundreds of thousands of temporary workers hired for the 2020 census did not have their background checks properly reviewed and decided, "resulting in persons with significant issues working for the Bureau and, in some instances, contacting households" during the door-knocking phase of the nation's head count, said the report released this week from the Office of Inspector General.</p> <p>In one case, a census taker who had faced an assault charge in 2016 knocked on doors for 38 days during the 2020 census, and someone who had been charged in 2011 with attempted first-degree burglary also worked as a census taker for 69 days. The report did not say where the census takers were located.</p> <p>The report said investigative workers reviewing the cases for the Census Bureau may have missed red flags in documents "due to pressure to review a significantly higher number of cases." Employment for the 2020 census peaked with 288,000 workers in August 2020, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.</p> <p>Ineffective oversight "increases the risk of unsuitable individuals working in positions of public trust and, in some cases, contacting the public on the Bureau's behalf or accessing sensitive Bureau information such as household data," the report said.</p> <p>The Office of Inspector General also found backlogged reviews of background checks for longer-term employees.</p>

	<p>At the end of November 2019, the bureau had a backlog of nearly 300 cases in which background checks had raised major concerns but the employees continued to work for the statistical agency without a final determination on whether they should be let go or stay, the report said.</p> <p>Background checks of newly-hired Census Bureau employees are conducted by an outside agency at the Department of Defense, and continued employment is contingent on the new worker passing the screening. Once the background check is finished, the case is sent back to the Census Bureau, which must determine if the worker should continue to be employed.</p> <p>As of last December, the bureau had a backlog of 5,484 cases in which no determination had been made, with some dating back to 2014, the report said.</p> <p>Besides the once-a-decade census, the Census Bureau also regularly hires workers to conduct its other surveys.</p> <p>In a written response, the Census Bureau said it already had begun making changes ahead of the release of the report and added that it has a rigorous process of screening potential employees before they are even hired, including fingerprinting that is vetted by the FBI.</p> <p>The Census Bureau said it takes the background check process seriously, “recognizing the imperative to both protect our data and to preserve public trust.”</p>
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HEADLINE	05/11 Massive New Mexico wildfire grows
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/wildfires-mountains-fires-environment-new-mexico-f6a141957aaab16a280f9af06bf3e21a
GIST	<p>Burning now for more than a month, the largest wildfire in the U.S. was spreading toward mountain resort towns in northern New Mexico on Wednesday, prompting officials to issue another set of warnings for more people to evacuate.</p> <p>“Day 36,” fire spokesman Bill Morse said at a briefing Wednesday night. “Ever since April 6, this fire has grown day by day by day.”</p> <p>Meanwhile, a wildfire that erupted Wednesday afternoon in coastal Southern California raced through coastal bluffs of multimillion-dollar mansions, burning at least 20 homes, fire officials said. The flames were fanned by gusty ocean winds but they were dying down Wednesday night. No injuries were reported but several streets were ordered evacuated.</p> <p>The fire, which occurred in Laguna Niguel, was relatively small at about 200 acres (81 hectares) but the wind drove embers into palm trees, attics and dense, dry brush on slopes and steep canyons that hadn’t burned for decades, Brian Fennessy, chief of the Orange County Fire Authority, said at an evening news conference.</p> <p>Fennessy said climate change has made even small fires that once would have been easily contained into extreme threats to life and property throughout the West.</p> <p>As night fell, fire officials in New Mexico said the fastest-moving flames along the eastern front of the Sangre de Cristo range on the southern end of the Rockies were headed farther northeast — away from the area’s biggest population center in Taos, a well-known tourist enclave 40 miles (64 kilometers) south of the Colorado line.</p> <p>“Currently no issues in the Taos area,” fire operations chief Todd Abel said. “The fire is kind of wanting to move to the north and east a little bit. But we’re still going to pay close attention.”</p>

Some aircraft were able to fly to drop retardant on the blaze despite winds gusting in some areas in excess of 45 mph (72 kph). And some evacuation orders were relaxed along the southern flank of the fire near Las Vegas, New Mexico — more than 50 miles (80 km) south of the flames on the northern perimeter.

Additional crews were on order to join the more than 1,800 personnel fighting the fire, and forecasters said conditions should be more favorable by the weekend if crews can hold their ground through another red-flag warning stretch into Thursday evening.

On Wednesday, the most active part of the wind-fueled fire northeast of Mora was tossing hot embers farther into unburned territory giving the fire an even bigger foothold on the tinder-dry landscape.

“Another hot, dry, windy day. No surprises there,” fire incident meteorologist Makoto Moore said at Wednesday night’s briefing in Las Vegas.

After growing more than 50 square miles (130 square kilometers) the day before, the fire had charred more than 370 square miles (958 square kilometers) by Wednesday morning. Evacuations were ordered for villages south of the resort town of Angel Fire east of Taos, where residents were told to also be packed and ready to go.

The towering plume of smoke created by the raging wildfire could be seen hundreds of miles away Wednesday afternoon, but it was more unnerving for residents of Taos.

“I think everyone is a little on edge,” Karina Armijo, a town spokeswoman, said Wednesday, adding that she’s been busy fielding calls from people who are wondering whether it’s still safe to visit. “It’s hard to say what’s going to happen a week from now versus three weeks from now — or even tomorrow.”

In winter, the challenging ski slopes just north of town draw people from around the world. Just last month, the Taos ski valley hosted the World Pro Ski Tour’s championship races. Art galleries, adobe churches and a rich history of Hispanic and Native American culture are the attractions in warmer months along with the aspen-covered biking and hiking trails that traverse the region.

The fire already has burned through a forested landscape held sacred by its rural residents, many losing homes that have been in their families for generations. Some residents allowed to return Tuesday and Wednesday found only charred rubble. Others were more fortunate as the flames skirted their homes.

Firefighters were working to protect buildings around the towns of Mora and Holman and in smaller villages to the north, while authorities closed many roads in the area due to firefighting activity, smoke and fire danger.

“This is tough firefighting business right here,” fire Incident Commander Dave Bales said in a briefing. “This is not easy, especially in the fuel types we’re in, in the Ponderosa pine, mixed conifer, even down into the grass. When we can’t fly aircraft, when we can’t get people on the direct edge of the fire, when it’s spotting over us, that’s a huge concern for us.”

A federal disaster already has been declared because of the blaze, which is partly the result of a preventative fire that escaped containment on April 6 after it was set to clear brush and small trees so they could not serve as wildfire fuel. That fire merged with another wildfire several weeks later.

Crews also were battling a smaller fire near Los Alamos National Laboratory, a key government facility for nuclear research that has been tapped to ramp up production of plutonium components for the nation’s nuclear arsenal. Most employees began working remotely this week as the lab and adjacent town prepared for possible evacuations as a precaution.

Crews working that blaze have been using heavy machinery to clear out vegetation and build more fire lines in hopes of keeping the flames from moving closer to the community.

HEADLINE	05/11 Rising Covid, few schools mask mandates
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/covid-health-pennsylvania-new-jersey-maine-5d04712b3563f691cd667ec52b11348e
GIST	<p>CAMBRIDGE, Mass. (AP) — U.S. COVID-19 cases are up, leading a smattering of school districts, particularly in the Northeast, to bring back mask mandates and recommendations for the first time since the omicron winter surge ended and as the country approaches 1 million deaths in the pandemic.</p> <p>The return of masking in schools is not nearly as widespread as earlier in the pandemic, particularly as the public's worries over the virus have ebbed. But districts in Maine, New Jersey and Pennsylvania have brought masks back, with a few in Massachusetts also recommending them even as the school year enters its final weeks.</p> <p>Maine's largest school district, in Portland, said this week masks would return, with Superintendent Xavier Botana saying that was the "safest course at this time" amid rising cases. Bangor, Maine, schools also brought back a universal mask requirement.</p> <p>High schools in the suburbs of Pittsburgh and in Montclair, New Jersey, a commuter suburb of New York City, also announced a return to masking, albeit temporarily through this week. According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, most of the counties in the country considered to have "high" levels of COVID-19 are in the Northeast.</p> <p>In parts of Massachusetts that have seen high levels of COVID-19 transmission, authorities are also recommending masks in schools.</p> <p>Reactions have ranged from supportive to angry. On the Facebook page of Woodland Hills High School in suburban Pittsburgh, one woman called the change "#insane."</p> <p>Diana Martinez and Owen Cornwall, who have a first-grader at Graham and Parks School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, have been following the recommendation to mask their daughter.</p> <p>"We're very happy about it. It gives us a little peace of mind," said Martinez, 42, a professor at Tufts University. "I think the parents generally trend toward wearing them and that gives us some comfort. It's the same case at our pre-school. There will be a couple of parents who don't mask their child, but we will be masking our child."</p> <p>Cornwall said there seems to be a general consensus in the school community in favor of playing it safe.</p> <p>"We're sort of lucky in this neighborhood, that they share our concerns with health," said Cornwall, 37, a visiting scholar at Tufts.</p> <p>Reported daily cases in the U.S. are averaging 79,000, up 50% over the past two weeks, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University. That's a fraction of where daily case counts stood earlier this year, when they topped 800,000.</p> <p>However, current case counts are a vast undercount because of a major downturn in testing and the fact tests are being taken at home and not reported to health departments.</p> <p>An influential modeling group at the University of Washington in Seattle estimates that only 13% of cases are being reported to health authorities in the U.S. — which would mean an undercount of more than a half million new infections every day.</p> <p>Despite the uptick in cases and the return to masking in a small number of schools, the response across the country has been largely subdued, reflecting the public's exhaustion after more than two years of restrictions.</p> <p>Outside of schools, however, officials have shown little interest in returning to mask mandates.</p>

Last month, Philadelphia abandoned its indoor mask mandate just days after becoming the first large American city to reimpose the requirement in response to an increase in COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations.

The United States is approaching the grim marker of 1 million deaths from COVID-19. Globally, there have been more than 6 million deaths in the pandemic, according to a tally from Johns Hopkins University.

Hospital workers at Providence St. Joseph Hospital in Orange, California, who labored through the worst of the pandemic paused Wednesday to recognize the sacrifice.

Intensive care unit nurse coordinator Patsy Brandenburger was among the many hospital caregivers who received a blessing from Father Patrick Okonkwo, a hospital chaplain, during the Roman Catholic ceremony.

She recalled the worst days of the pandemic, when the hospital was filled with hundreds of patients, including dozens on ventilators; now the hospital has just seven COVID-19 patients.

“The amount of patients we saw that passed away in the ICU was so, so, so hard. And just the families that couldn’t be there with them was extremely hard on all of us,” Brandenburger said fighting away tears.

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HEADLINE	05/11 OD deaths continue rising: fentanyl, meth
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/11/us/politics/overdose-deaths-fentanyl-meth.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — After a catastrophic increase in 2020, deaths from drug overdoses rose again to record-breaking levels in 2021, nearing 108,000, the result of an ever-worsening fentanyl crisis, according to preliminary new data published on Wednesday by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.</p> <p>The increase of nearly 15 percent followed a much steeper rise of almost 30 percent in 2020, an unrelenting crisis that has consumed federal and state drug policy officials. Since the 1970s, the number of drug overdose deaths has increased every year except 2018.</p> <p>A growing share of deaths continue to come from overdoses involving fentanyl, a class of potent synthetic opioids that are often mixed with other drugs, and methamphetamine, a synthetic stimulant. State health officials battling an influx of both drugs said many of the deaths appeared to be the result of combining the two.</p> <p>Drug overdoses, which long ago surged above the country’s peak deaths from AIDS, car crashes and guns, killed about a quarter as many Americans last year as Covid-19.</p> <p>Deaths involving synthetic opioids — largely fentanyl — rose to 71,000 from 58,000, while those associated with stimulants like methamphetamine, which has grown cheaper and more lethal in recent years, increased to 33,000 from 25,000. Because fentanyl is a white powder, it can be easily combined with other drugs, including opioids like heroin, and stimulants like meth and cocaine, and can be stamped into counterfeit pills for anti-anxiety drugs like Xanax. Such mixtures can prove lethal if drug users are unaware they are taking fentanyl or are unsure of the dose.</p> <p>Deaths from both classes of drugs have been rising in recent years.</p> <p>But there is growing evidence that mixing stimulants and opioids — into combinations known as “speedballs” and “goofballs” — is becoming more common, too. Dan Ciccarone, a professor of family and community medicine at the University of California, San Francisco, who studies drug markets, has just begun a multiyear study of the combination of opioids and meth.</p>

“There’s an intertwined synthetics epidemic the likes of which we’ve never seen,” he said. “We’ve never seen a powerful opioid such as fentanyl being mixed with such a potent methamphetamine.”

The numbers released on Wednesday are considered provisional, and may change as the government reviews more death records. But they showed that a crisis that escalated sharply during the first year of the pandemic does not appear to be letting up.

Regina LaBelle, an addiction policy expert at Georgetown University, said that while the nearly 108,000 estimated deaths were without precedent, the smaller increase relative to 2020 was a “hopeful sign.”

“One year doesn’t make a trend,” she said. “We’re going to have to look at a few years in a row.”

The White House in recent weeks announced President Biden’s first [national drug control strategy](#), and [a plan](#) to combat meth use was unveiled last week by his drug czar, Dr. Rahul Gupta, the first medical doctor to oversee the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy. Overdose deaths involving meth almost tripled between 2015 and 2019 in people 18 to 64, [according to the National Institutes of Health](#).

“It is unacceptable that we are losing a life to overdose every five minutes around the clock,” Dr. Gupta said in a statement on Wednesday.

Mr. Biden is the first president to embrace harm reduction, [an approach](#) that has been criticized by some as enabling drug users, but praised by addiction experts as a way to keep drug users alive while providing access to treatment and support.

Instead of pushing abstinence, the approach aims to lower the risk of dying or acquiring infectious diseases by offering sterile equipment — through [needle exchanges](#), for example — or tools to check drugs for the presence of fentanyl. Strips that can detect fentanyl have become increasingly valuable resources for local health officials, and some states have moved recently to [decriminalize them](#), even as [others resist](#).

[Recent settlements](#) with prescription opioid manufacturers and distributors will soon bring new resources to states battling the overdose epidemic.

The causes of the continued increase in overdoses are complex and hard to untangle, experts said. But state health officials and some addiction experts said the spike in overdoses, which began before the pandemic, could not be blamed solely on the disruptions that came with it, or on a major increase in the number of Americans using drugs.

Social isolation and economic dislocation, which have been widespread during the pandemic, do tend to cause relapses in drug use, and could have contributed to rising overdoses. Shutdowns early in 2020 also caused some addiction treatment providers to temporarily close their doors. But the pandemic alone does not explain the recent trend.

Policy changes made during the pandemic may have helped prevent more deaths. Ms. LaBelle, the Georgetown addiction expert, said [early research](#) had found that loosening rules to permit take-home methadone treatment had been beneficial, along with an increase in treatment via telemedicine.

“The difference in what we’re seeing now is not how many people are using,” said Dr. Anne Zink, the chief health official in Alaska, which saw the largest overdose death percentage increase of any state in the nation, according to the data released on Wednesday.

Instead, she said, the fentanyl supply had skyrocketed, in shipments that were difficult to track, penetrating even the most isolated parts of the state. Of the 140 fentanyl overdose deaths the state recorded in 2021, [over 60 percent](#) also involved meth, and nearly 30 percent involved heroin.

Fentanyl, which is made in a lab, can be [cheaper and easier to produce and distribute](#) than heroin, enhancing its appeal to dealers and traffickers. But because it is strong and sold in varying formulations,

small disparities in quantity can mean the difference between a drug user's usual dose and one that proves deadly. It is particularly dangerous when it is consumed unwittingly by drug users who do not usually take opioids. The spread of fentanyl into an ever-growing portion of the nation's drug supply has continued to flummox even states with strong addiction-treatment services.

Often synthesized in Mexico from precursor chemicals made in China, fentanyl long ago permeated the heroin markets of the Northeast and the Midwest. But recent data shows it has established a strong hold in the South and the West as well.

"The economics of fentanyl have just been pushing the other drugs out of the market," said Dr. Joshua Sharfstein, a vice dean of the Bloomberg School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins University. "It's just so cheap to buy fentanyl and turn around and put it in whatever."

Across Alaska, Dr. Zink said, fentanyl kills many overdose victims before bystanders or emergency responders can revive them with naloxone, a medication that can quickly reverse an opioid overdose.

"You don't have a second chance if you don't immediately have naloxone available," she said.

A [recent study](#) of illicit pills seized by drug enforcement authorities found that a substantial share of what is marketed as OxyContin, Xanax or the attention deficit hyperactivity disorder drug Adderall now contains fentanyl. The spread of these counterfeit pills may explain a [recent sharp increase](#) in overdose deaths among teenagers, who are less likely to inject drugs than older people.

Pat Allen, the Oregon Health Authority director, said that, as was the case in other states with surging overdose deaths, the clear difference in 2021 had been the ubiquity of fentanyl. Children as young as 12 are [considered at high risk](#) of obtaining counterfeit pills containing fentanyl, and [high schoolers are overdosing](#) on them, believing they are opioid painkillers or anti-anxiety medication. The state was working to send naloxone tool kits to schools, similar to a program it has used in fast food restaurants, where people were overdosing in bathrooms.

Mr. Allen said he had seen an alarming phenomenon among those who overdose: They perceive the risk of fentanyl to be low, even though the actual risk is "gravely higher."

"We've had an addiction issue in Oregon which we've known about for a long time," he said. "This takes that existing addiction issue and makes it much more dangerous."

In 2021, overdoses amounted to one of the leading causes of death in the United States, similar to the number of people who died from diabetes and Alzheimer's disease, and roughly a quarter of the number of people who died from Covid-19, the third leading cause of death, [according to the C.D.C.](#)

In Vermont, which saw one of the biggest increases in overdose deaths last year, 93 percent of opioid deaths were fentanyl-related, according to Kelly Dougherty, the state's deputy health commissioner.

"In the beginning stages of the pandemic, we were attributing the increase to life being disrupted," she said. But now, she added, a different explanation seems clear: "What is really the primary driver is the presence of fentanyl in the drug supply."

The state's celebrated ["hub and spoke" model](#) of addiction treatment and its aggressive use of [medication-assisted treatment programs](#), she said, were not enough to contend with the ease and speed with which people overdose on fentanyl.

"You can have the most robust treatment system," she said, "and not everybody is going to avail themselves of it when maybe they should, or before they end up overdosing."

And fentanyl is showing up in counterfeit pills, Ms. Dougherty said, including in OxyContin.

	She said Vermont officials had taken up new public messaging regarding fentanyl.
	“Just assume that it’s everywhere,” she said.
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HEADLINE	05/11 Study: Native American boarding schools
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/us-interior-to-release-report-on-indigenous-boarding-schools/
GIST	<p>FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. (AP) — A first-of-its-kind federal study of Native American boarding schools that for over a century sought to assimilate Indigenous children into white society has identified more than 500 student deaths at the institutions, but officials expect that figure to grow exponentially as research continues.</p> <p>The Interior Department report released Wednesday expands to more than 400 the number of schools that were established or supported by the U.S. government, starting in the early 19th century and continuing in some cases until the late 1960s. The agency identified the deaths in records for about 20 of the schools.</p> <p>The dark history of Native American boarding schools — where children were forced from their families, prohibited from speaking their languages and often abused — has been felt deeply across Indian Country and through generations.</p> <p>Many children never returned home, and the Interior Department said that with further investigation the number of known student deaths could climb to the thousands or even tens of thousands. Causes included disease, accidental injuries and abuse.</p> <p>“Each of those children is a missing family member, a person who was not able to live out their purpose on this Earth because they lost their lives as part of this terrible system,” said Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, whose paternal grandparents were sent to boarding school for several years.</p> <p>The agency is in the process of poring through thousands of boxes containing more than 98 million pages of records, with help from many Indigenous people who have had to work through their own trauma and pain. Accounting for the number of deaths will be difficult because records weren’t always kept.</p> <p>A second volume of the report will cover burial sites as well as the federal government’s financial investment in the schools and the impacts of the boarding schools on Indigenous communities, the Interior Department said. It has so far identified at least 53 burial sites at or near boarding schools, not all of which have marked graves.</p> <p>Tribal leaders have pressed the agency to ensure that any children’s remains are properly cared for and returned to their tribes, if desired. To prevent them from being disturbed, the burial sites’ locations will not be publicly released, said Bryan Newland, the Interior Department’s assistant secretary for Indian Affairs.</p> <p>At a news conference Wednesday, Haaland choked back tears as she described how the boarding school era perpetuated poverty, mental health disorders, substance abuse and premature deaths in Indigenous communities.</p> <p>“Recognizing the impacts of the federal Indian boarding school system cannot just be a historical reckoning,” she said. “We must also chart a path forward to deal with these legacy issues.”</p> <p>Haaland, who is Laguna, announced an initiative last June to investigate the schools’ troubled legacy and uncover the truth about the government’s role in them. The 408 schools her agency identified operated in 37 states or territories, many of them in Oklahoma, Arizona and New Mexico.</p> <p>Others who spoke included Deborah Parker, chief executive of the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition, who tearfully recalled stories of a boarding school on the Tulalip reservation,</p>

where she's from in Washington state. The school had a small jail cell and a basement where at least one girl routinely was chained to a heater and beaten, she said. Others hid to shield themselves from abuse.

"I am concerned when we begin to open these doors for our boarding school survivors to come forward and share their stories," Parker said.

Basil Brave Heart attended Holy Rosary Mission in Pine Ridge, South Dakota, in the 1940s. He called having his hair cut by older students a "divide and conquer" strategy that made Native children take part in their own cultural destruction.

He was prohibited from practicing Lakota spiritual traditions and speaking his language that he said has a spiritual resonance not easily translated into English.

"Taking our language away is huge," he said Wednesday. "It goes to our identity."

The Interior Department acknowledged the number of schools identified could change as more data is gathered. The coronavirus pandemic and budget restrictions hindered some of the research over the past year, said Newland, a citizen of the Bay Mills Indian Community.

The U.S. government directly ran some of the boarding schools. Catholic, Protestant and other churches operated others with federal funding, backed by U.S. laws and policies to "civilize" Native Americans. The federal government still oversees more than 180 schools in nearly two dozen states that serve Native Americans, but the schools' missions are vastly different from the past.

The Interior Department report was prompted by the discovery of hundreds of unmarked graves at former residential school sites in Canada that brought back painful memories for Indigenous communities.

Haaland also announced Wednesday a yearlong tour for Interior Department officials that will allow former boarding school students from Native American tribes, Alaska Native villages and Native Hawaiian communities to share their stories as part of a permanent oral history collection.

The conditions at boarding and residential schools varied across the U.S. and Canada. While some former students have reported positive experiences, children at the schools often were subject to military-style discipline.

James LaBelle Sr., who is Inupiaq, said he attended to two federal boarding schools where he learned about European and American history and language, math and science but nothing about Indigenous cultures and traditions.

"I came out not knowing who I was," he said.

The boarding school coalition, which created an early inventory of the schools and shared its research with the Interior Department, praised Interior's work but noted the agency's scope is limited. The coalition has identified about 90 other boarding schools that fall outside the federal government's criteria.

A U.S. House subcommittee on Thursday will hear testimony on a bill to create a truth and healing commission modeled after one in Canada. Parker said it's important in revealing a fuller truth about what happened to Native children.

"Our children deserve to be found," she said. "Our children deserve to be brought home. We are here for their justice. And we will not stop advocating until the United States fully accounts for the genocide committed against Native children."

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HEADLINE	05/11 Court nixes Calif. gun sales ban to under-21
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/court-californias-under-21-gun-sales-ban-unconstitutional/

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A U.S. appeals court ruled Wednesday that California's ban on the sale of semi-automatic weapons to adults under 21 is unconstitutional.

In a 2-1 ruling, a panel of the San Francisco-based 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals said Wednesday the law violates the Second Amendment right to bear arms and a San Diego judge should have blocked what it called "an almost total ban on semiautomatic centerfire rifles" for young adults. "America would not exist without the heroism of the young adults who fought and died in our revolutionary army," Judge Ryan Nelson wrote. "Today we reaffirm that our Constitution still protects the right that enabled their sacrifice: the right of young adults to keep and bear arms."

The Firearms Policy Coalition, which brought the case, said the ruling makes it optimistic age-based gun bans will be overturned in other courts.

Adam Winkler, a law professor at the University of California, Los Angeles, said the decision is a clear sign of how courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court which has a major gun case before it, are expanding gun rights.

"Federal judges can read the tea leaves," Winkler said. "In the coming years, the courts seem certain to strike down numerous gun safety measures in the name of the 2nd Amendment. This 9th Circuit ruling is a harbinger of things to come."

The ruling, however, was not a total victory for gun rights advocates.

They also sought an injunction blocking the state from requiring a hunting license for adults under 21 — who are not in the military or law enforcement — to purchase rifles or shotguns.

Handgun sales to those under 21 were already prohibited when the hunting license requirement was passed in 2018 after some of the nation's worst mass shootings were committed by young adults using rifles, including the Valentine's Day slayings at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida.

The following year, the Legislature acted to address what it saw as a loophole after an April 2019 synagogue shooting in San Diego County.

A 19-year-old armed with a semi-automatic rifle he had just purchased with a hunting license killed a 60-year-old woman and injured three others, including the rabbi and an 8-year-old girl at Chabad of Poway.

The state passed the law banning sales of semiautomatic centerfire rifles to anyone under 21. There were exemptions for police or military troops but not for those with hunting licenses.

Matthew Jones, a 20-year-old at the time from Santee in San Diego County, originally sued saying he wanted a gun to defend himself and other lawful purposes but didn't want to obtain a hunting license.

His lawsuit, which had been filed before the underage ban on semi-automatic weapons, was amended to also challenge that law.

The suit said the state had "whittled down (the) already inapplicable and irrelevant hunting license 'exemption' — the only exemption that is even possible for an ordinary, law abiding young adult who does not wish to enter into a highly dangerous career in law enforcement or the military — by prohibiting an entire class of firearms."

The 9th Circuit ruled the hunting license requirement was reasonable for increasing public safety through "sensible firearm control."

But it said an outright ban on semi-automatic rifles for those under 21 went too far.

“It’s one thing to say that young adults must take a course and purchase a hunting license before obtaining certain firearms,” Nelson wrote. “But to say that they must become police officers or join the military? ... It is a blanket ban for everyone except police officers and servicemembers.”

Nelson and Judge Kenneth Lee, who ruled in the majority, were part of Republican President Donald Trump’s wave of conservative-approved nominees that reshaped the famously liberal court.

Two years ago, Lee authored a 2-1 decision that threw out California’s ban on high-capacity ammunition magazines, saying the law violated the U.S. Constitution’s protection of the right to bear firearms. That ruling was later overturned by the court’s 7-4 review of the decision.

A dissent was written by U.S. District Court Judge Sidney Stein, who was assigned to the panel from the Southern District of New York. Stein was nominated to that court by Democratic President Bill Clinton.

Stein said he would have upheld the lower court’s decision not to block either law.

Stein said the regulation did not place a “severe burden” on gun ownership rights on young adults and noted they could get semi-automatic rifles from family members or borrow them from others.

He also said the majority failed to consider the disproportionate amount of violent crime committed by those under 21 who have relatively less mature cognitive development.

Democratic Sen. Anthony Portantino of La Cañada Flintridge, who wrote both laws, said he was disappointed the semiautomatic ban was struck down but was pleased the hunting license requirement survived.

“I remain committed to keeping deadly weapons out of the wrong hands,” Portantino said. “Student safety on our campuses is something we should all rally behind and sensible gun control is part of that solution.”

Attorney General Rob Bonta’s office said it was reviewing the decision. In a statement, a spokesperson said it was committed to “defending California’s commonsense gun laws.”

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HEADLINE	05/11 Duwamish Tribe sue for federal recognition
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/duwamish-tribe-files-new-lawsuit-in-bid-for-federal-recognition/
GIST	<p>The Duwamish Tribe has filed a lawsuit seeking federal recognition that it is indeed an Indian tribe.</p> <p>Filed in U.S. District Court for Western Washington on Wednesday, the suit is part of a continuing battle for recognition by the Duwamish stretching over 40 years and through multiple presidential administrations.</p> <p>This time, the group that has identified itself as the Duwamish Tribe argues that the federal government has on several occasions dealt with it as a tribe and now must recognize it as such — a status the Duwamish argue they never lost.</p> <p>“Beginning in 1859 through at least the 1970s, dozens of acts of Congress and two U.S. courts have recognized the Duwamish Tribe as an Indian tribe and the successor in interest to the Tribe that signed the Treaty of Point Elliott,” the suit contends. “Congress has neither abrogated its recognition of the Duwamish Tribe nor otherwise limited the Tribe’s rights.”</p> <p>The suit also contends that the federal government has illegally discriminated against the matriarchal tribe by discounting its members, largely descended from marriages between Duwamish women and non-Indian men — a violation of the federal equal protection clause under the Fifth Amendment.</p>

The U.S. Department of Interior also did not use rules more favorable to the tribe when considering its prior filing, according to the suit, which was brought against Secretary of Interior Deb Haaland and other federal officials by Cecile Hansen, longtime chairwoman of the Duwamish tribal council.

As remedy, the suit seeks declaration by the court that the Duwamish are a federally recognized tribe. Alternatively, the suit demands the court set aside the denial of recognition in 2015 by the Obama administration, with instruction to reconsider the case under 2015 regulations in a manner “that does not discriminate against matrilineal tribes like the Duwamish, which primarily descend from Indian women.”

Alternatively, the tribe wants the final decision of 2015 set aside with instructions to grant the tribe a formal, on-the-record hearing before an administrative law judge for its claim.

Central to the tribe’s suit is assertion by Hansen that the tribe never disappeared — contrary to findings by federal evaluators in prior petitions for federal recognition and by U.S. District Court Judge George Boldt.

In his 1979 ruling on the tribe’s petition for treaty fishing rights, Boldt found the Duwamish Tribe was more of a social organization but did not have governmental authority over its members or others.

“The ... Duwamish Tribe is not an entity that is descended from any of the tribal entities that were signatory to the Treaty of Point Elliott,” Boldt found. “The citizens comprising the ... Duwamish Tribe have not maintained an organized tribal structure in a political sense.”

Evaluators at the Department of Interior also consistently found that the tribe did not meet all the criteria to be recognized as an Indian tribe — in particular, maintenance of continuous governmental authority since before treaty-making with the U.S.

Federal recognition is more than acknowledgment of Indian heritage. Recognition of a tribal group as a government opens the door to federal benefits; required government-to-government consultation; and privileges including operation of Las Vegas-style casinos.

Federal law allows tribal governments to run such casinos to fund tribal government programs, on the logic that they are no different from state-run lotteries.

The tribe’s latest suit comes amid a heated public relations battle between the Duwamish and several of the region’s federally recognized tribes about just who are the “real” Duwamish.

The Muckleshoot, Suquamish, Tulalip and Puyallup tribes have in newspaper ads, op-eds and correspondence argued that the Duwamish persist indeed — as enrolled members of recognized tribes all over the region, enjoying all the rights and benefits of enrollment.

They also note the U.S. kept its promise in 1855 of creating reservations at Lummi, Tulalip, Swinomish, and for the Duwamish, at Port Madison with the Suquamish. In 1857, another reservation was created at Muckleshoot, where Duwamish people also could go. Today, many of the people enrolled at reservations around Puget Sound have some degree of Duwamish ancestry.

These recognized tribes also point to the finding the Duwamish now challenge, that the Seattle group is a remnant group, without the basis to be identified as a continuous political entity that dates back to before the Treaty of Point Elliott in 1855.

This, the Duwamish seek to show, is contrary to both the facts, and the law, with real consequences for people enrolled in the Duwamish Tribe, if they are not also enrolled in a federally recognized tribe. For instance, during the pandemic, federal benefits were distributed only to recognized tribes.

No matter how the suit comes out, there is of course more than one way to be identified as an Indian tribe.

Apart from federal recognition, the Duwamish already have a kind of social recognition, with acknowledgment as a tribe and consultation common among all sorts of local and state entities.

The Duwamish also have been raising about \$1 million a year for their nonprofit, Duwamish Tribal Services, from the online fundraiser Real Rent Duwamish.

However, it is the dignity and stability of federal recognition the Duwamish say they seek for people here since before the city took the name of Chief Si'ahl, Anglicized as Seattle, and born of Duwamish and Suquamish parents.

“For at least 12,000 years, the Duwamish people have been living here,” Ken Workman, Duwamish tribal council member and a descendant of Chief Seattle, states in the suit. “They are buried under the streets and the sidewalks and the houses of Seattle. Their DNA rises from the roots of the trees and when the wind blows through the leaves, those are the sounds of our ancestors.”

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HEADLINE	05/11 High inflation leaves food banks struggling
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/high-inflation-leaves-food-banks-struggling-to-meet-needs/
GIST	<p>Kendall Nunamaker and her family of five in Kennewick, Washington, faced impossible math this month: How to pay for gas, groceries and the mortgage with inflation driving up prices?</p> <p>Like many other working families, the Nunamakers are grappling with the 8.3% inflation in the consumer price index in April announced Wednesday — slowing slightly from the March figure which was the largest year-over-year increase since 1981, according to the Labor Department. The national average gas price reached a record high Wednesday of \$4.40 a gallon. And global food prices are climbing after shortages caused by Russia’s war against Ukraine and other supply chain problems.</p> <p>Food banks across America say those economic conditions are intensifying demand for their support at a time when their labor and distribution costs are climbing and donations are slowing. The problem has grown to the point where last week President Joe Biden called for a Conference on Hunger, Nutrition and Health in September, the first since 1969.</p> <p>For many families like the Nunamakers, food insecurity became a painful surprise.</p> <p>“There’s no reason us as a couple and a family should be struggling so hard,” Nunamaker said. “We make decent money.”</p> <p>She works three days a week at a home décor store for \$15.25 an hour; her husband, Nick, works a full-time union job as a paratransit driver at \$27 an hour. Though they receive some money from a state nutrition program for young children that their two youngest qualify for, they still spent \$360 on groceries last week.</p> <p>Because of inflated prices, those groceries didn’t go far enough to feed everyone. And the family still lacked money to pay other household bills, leaving Nunamaker wondering how she would stretch their next paychecks to cover those bills and their mortgage this month.</p> <p>In the past, to bridge the gap, the family sold off possessions like VR headsets and firearms.</p> <p>“At some point,” Nunamaker said, “we’re not going to have anything because we would have sold everything.”</p> <p>So Nunamaker and her husband visited two local food banks for the first time last week.</p>

The pandemic forced roughly 60 million Americans to seek help for food insecurity, according to Feeding America. At the end of 2021, as hiring boomed, demand for food banks returned to regular levels. But the relief was short-lived.

“In the last few months, with this increase in inflationary pressures, we’re seeing 95% of our 200 member food banks saying that they have seen either leveling or an increase in need,” said Claire Babineaux-Fontenot, CEO of Feeding America.

In the area along the Columbia River where Nunamaker lives, the number of clients seeking food aid at a church pantry jumped 40% between December and March, according to Eric Williams, director of community partnerships at Second Harvest, an organization that works to supply local pantries with food.

He said his organization must make more happen with less because its suppliers are subject to the same cost increases. The price that Second Harvest pays for obtaining donated produce has risen from about 6 cents a pound a year ago to about 10 or 11 cents a pound now, Williams said.

Some of Feeding America’s food pantry partners have closed because of dwindling donations and higher costs for receiving and delivering food. Others have less food on their shelves even though they have higher demand.

“Our network emphasizes access and equity,” Babineaux-Fontenot said. “So we are working extra hard to reach people who have the deepest food insecurity rates. Well, how far out can we go when gas prices are high? We have data that shows that race and place are significant indicators of whether or not you will be food insecure and how deeply you will be food insecure.”

Because of inflation and a reduction in aid, a food bank that serves three counties in Ohio — also called Second Harvest — is facing a drop in the amount of food it’s able to provide.

“Compared to last year at this time, we’re about 50% down in what we have received in the past in federal food donations and then about 20% down from food drives in our collection of food at the grocery stores,” Executive Director Tyra Jackson said. “All of that combined is truly having an impact on our budget because we’re needing to purchase more food outright.”

The struggles of families are heightened by the fact that government benefits that were increased during the pandemic like food stamps or unemployment insurance have stopped or will end shortly.

“Our work is always important,” Babineaux-Fontenot said. “It’s increasingly important when we have all of these headwinds.”

Williams, of Spokane, extended gratitude to the donors and volunteers that keep his organization running, some of whom worked more than 100 shifts last year. He said it can be difficult to witness first hand the scale of the food insecurity in his community when helping with distributions at a mobile food bank.

“You see the need and you just go, ‘Oh God, oh my God,’ ” Williams said. “But then as you hand somebody a box of food and they drive off: ‘Yeah, we were able to help,’ which is heart-wrenching on one hand and heartwarming on the other.”

Because it upsets her so much, Nunamaker said, she hasn’t discussed her family’s struggles with her three children, age 2, 4 and 7, or her network of friends and relatives. She said the food banks helped her family last week.

“People should know that just because you have to go to a food bank or you have to seek assistance, that doesn’t make you any less of a parent or a person,” she said. “Because everybody needs help sometimes.”

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SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/north-korea-raises-alarm-after-confirming-1st-covid-19-case/
GIST	<p>SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea confirmed its first coronavirus infections of the pandemic Thursday after holding for more than two years to a widely doubted claim of a perfect record keeping out the virus that has spread to nearly every place in the world.</p> <p>The official Korean Central News Agency said tests of samples collected Sunday from an unspecified number of people with fevers in the capital, Pyongyang, confirmed they were infected with the omicron variant.</p> <p>In response, leader Kim Jong Un called for a thorough lockdown of cities and counties and said workplaces should be isolated by units to block the virus from spreading, KCNA said.</p> <p>The country's population of 26 million is believed to be mostly unvaccinated, after its government shunned vaccines offered by the U.N.-backed COVAX distribution program, possibly because those have international monitoring requirements.</p> <p>Kim during a ruling party Politburo meeting called for officials to stabilize transmissions and eliminate the infection source as fast as possible, while also easing the inconveniences to the public caused by the virus controls. Kim said "single-minded public unity is the most powerful guarantee that can win in this anti-pandemic fight," KCNA said.</p> <p>Despite the decision to elevate anti-virus steps, Kim ordered officials to push ahead with scheduled construction, agricultural development and other state projects while bolstering the country's defense postures to avoid any security vacuum.</p> <p>North Korea's announcement of the infections came after NK News, a North Korea-focused news site, cited unidentified sources who said authorities had imposed a lockdown on Pyongyang residents. South Korea's government said it couldn't confirm the report.</p> <p>It isn't immediately clear how large the North's outbreak is. The North will likely double down on lockdowns, even though the failure of China's "zero-COVID" approach suggests that approach doesn't work against the fast-moving omicron variant, said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor of international studies at Seoul's Ewha Womans University.</p> <p>"For Pyongyang to publicly admit omicron cases, the public health situation must be serious," Easley said. "This does not mean North Korea is suddenly going to be open to humanitarian assistance and take a more conciliatory line toward Washington and Seoul. But the Kim regime's domestic audience may be less interested in nuclear or missile tests when the urgent threat involves coronavirus rather than a foreign military."</p> <p>Experts say a major COVID-19 outbreak would be devastating in North Korea because of the poor health care system and could possibly trigger instability when combined with other problems like serious food shortages.</p> <p>North Korea's previous coronavirus-free claim had been disputed by many foreign experts. But South Korean officials have said North Korea had likely avoided a huge outbreak, in part because it instituted strict virus controls almost from the start of the pandemic.</p> <p>Early in 2020 — before the coronavirus spread around the world — North Korea took severe steps to keep out the virus and described them as a matter of "national existence." It quarantined people with symptoms resembling COVID-19, all but halted cross-border traffic and trade for two years, and is even believed to have ordered troops to shoot on sight any trespassers who crossed its borders.</p>

The extreme border closures further shocked an economy already damaged by decades of mismanagement and U.S.-led sanctions over its nuclear weapons and missile program, pushing Kim to perhaps the toughest moment of his rule since he took power in 2011.

North Korea had been one of the last places in the world without an acknowledged COVID-19 case after the virus first detected in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in late 2019 spread to every continent including Antarctica. Turkmenistan, a similarly secretive and authoritarian nation in Central Asia, has reported no cases to the World Health Organization, though its claim also is widely doubted by outside experts.

In recent months, some Pacific island nations that kept the virus out by their geographic isolation have recorded outbreaks. Only tiny Tuvalu, with a population around 12,000, has escaped the virus so far, while a few other nations – Nauru, Micronesia and Marshall Islands – have stopped cases at their borders and avoided community outbreaks.

North Korea's confirmed outbreak comes as China — its close ally and trading partner — battles its biggest outbreak of the pandemic.

North Korea in January tentatively reopened railroad freight traffic between its border town of Sinuiju and China's Dandong for the first time in two years, but China halted the trade last month due to an outbreak in Liaoning province, which borders North Korea.

Most of the Liaoning city of Dandong has been under lockdown since late April, and in another city, Yingkou, 78 new cases were found Wednesday. Another border province, Jilin, had a major outbreak earlier with tens of thousands of cases, but that has largely receded.

The outbreaks in northeastern China have been overshadowed by the huge outbreak that has locked down Shanghai for weeks, as well as a small outbreak in Beijing that has prompted a raft of pandemic-related restrictions in the nation's capital.

It's unusual for North Korea to admit the outbreak of any infectious disease though Kim has occasionally been candid about national and social problems and policy failures.

During a flu pandemic in 2009 when the country was ruled by his father, Kim Jong Il, North Korea said that nine people in Pyongyang and the northwestern border town of Sinuiju had contracted the flu. Some outside experts said at the time the admission was aimed at winning outside aid.

Experts say Kim Jong Un still hasn't publicly asked for any aid including COVID-19 vaccines from the United States and South Korea amid the prolonged stalemate in nuclear diplomacy.

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HEADLINE	05/11 PCSD deputies \$10,000 retention bonus
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/article261355682.html
GIST	<p>In an effort to stave off Pierce County Sheriff Departments' historical mass exodus, the county has allocated \$4 million in bonuses.</p> <p>Pierce County received \$175 million in federal aid to respond to the coronavirus pandemic. Tuesday, the County Council passed budget adjustments to allocate federal dollars, including a \$10,000 retention bonus for each sheriff's deputy. Recruitment incentives and salary increases are also included in the \$4 million line item.</p> <p>Pierce County Sheriff Department's Sgt. Darren Moss said the \$10,000 retention bonus would show deputies are appreciated and give them reasons to stay.</p>

“We have fallen so far behind that some people were really looking over the fence to other departments and seeing them getting paid more,” Moss said. “Hopefully, it will help us retain deputies as much as we can.”

The Sheriff’s Department is short 50 funded deputy positions, and the sheriff expects more than 50 departures this year. The department is budgeted for about 344 deputy positions.

Council member Hans Zeiger (R-Puyallup) said the bonuses were necessary.

“This contains what I believe is needed to fund a contract with sheriff deputies, and that is of such importance in the time we are living. We are seeing crime rise in virtually every category,” he said at Tuesday’s council meeting.

Chair Derek Young (D-Gig Harbor) agreed, saying that there are ramifications to a diminished police force.

“Currently staffing is well below that which impacts response time, and the amount of stress on our deputies,” he said.

The sheriff’s department pay rate is lower than other law enforcement agencies in Pierce County and Puget Sound, council members and Moss said.

“To compete in this market, we need to step up substantially,” Young said.

The county’s starting pay for deputies is \$34.25 an hour. The Tacoma Police Department starts officers at \$33.51 an hour. Moss said incentives like education, shift differentials and higher pay increases per promotions are better in Tacoma.

Some deputies have moved to other departments because of pay, benefits and lateral incentives.

“With incentives, shift differential and matching deferred comp, other agencies pay well over what deputies make. We are the fourth lowest paid in the county compared to the other police agencies,” Moss said.

County Executive Bruce Dammeier made the budget request three months ago, saying the bonus would attract new applicants and retain deputies on the force.

So far, other financial incentives have not been enough of a draw to cover the sheriff’s staffing deficiency. The department currently offers law enforcement officers across Washington a bonus of \$15,000 to sign on in Pierce County, Sheriff Ed Troyer said in February. Last year marked a five-year high in departures when 36 deputies left the department.

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Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	05/11 LockBit strikes Canada jet fighter provider
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/top-aces-ransomware-attack-lockbit/
GIST	<p>A Canadian company that supplies fighter jets for airborne training exercises has been hit with a ransomware attack.</p> <p>In a brief statement to The Record on Wednesday, Top Aces confirmed that it is in the process of investigating the incident.</p>

The Montreal-based firm — which said it is the “exclusive adversary air provider to the Canadian and German armed forces” — showed up on the leak site for the LockBit ransomware group.

Top Aces was founded in 2000 by a group of former fighter pilots and now says it has the “the largest worldwide footprint of privately-held operational fighter aircraft.”

In addition to its work with Canada, Germany, Israel and other countries, the company [signed a lucrative contract](#) with the U.S. Air Force in 2019. It explicitly mentions providing tools for training to defend against Russian weaponry.

Emsisoft threat analyst Brett Callow noted that attacks on companies in the defense sector are concerning because “there is no way of knowing where stolen data may end up.”

“Even if the individuals behind the attack are simply for-profit cybercriminals, they may sell the data or make it otherwise available to third parties which could potential include hostile governments,” Callow said.

“There have been multiple attacks on companies in the defense industrial base sector in recent years, and government really needs to find a way to enhance security its supply chain.”

Callow pointed to previous attacks on [Visser Precision](#), a parts supplier for Lockheed Martin, and [Westech International](#), a US military contractor that provides support for the Minuteman III nuclear deterrent.

The LockBit ransomware group gave Top Aces a deadline of May 15 before it leaks the 44GB of data it allegedly stole.

LockBit continues to be one of the most prolific ransomware groups working, with hundreds of attacks over the last year. They have attacked at least 650 organizations so far this year, according to data collected by Recorded Future.

The group recently made waves with an [attack on a popular German library service](#) and another on systems connected to the [Secretary of State for Finance of Rio de Janeiro](#).

The Australian Cyber Security Centre (ACSC) issued a [security advisory](#) last August warning of a sudden spike in LockBit ransomware attacks.

The group [has been operating](#) since September 2019 and was a marginal player before developing a new version of their Ransomware-as-a-Service platform, called LockBit 2.0.

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HEADLINE	05/12 Lessons learned from Lapsus\$ attacks
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2022/05/everything-we-learned-from-lapsus.html
GIST	<p>In recent months, a cybercriminal gang known as LAPSUS\$ has claimed responsibility for a number of high-profile attacks against technology companies, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• T-Mobile (April 23, 2022)• Globant• Okta• Ubisoft• Samsung• Nvidia• Microsoft• Vodafone <p>In addition to these attacks, LAPSUS\$ was also able to successfully launch a ransomware attack against the Brazilian Ministry of Health.</p>

While high-profile cyber-attacks are certainly nothing new, there are several things that make LAPSUS\$ unique.

- The alleged mastermind of these attacks and several other alleged accomplices were all teenagers.
- Unlike more traditional ransomware gangs, LAPSUS\$ has a very strong social media presence.
- The gang is best known for data exfiltration. It has stolen source code and other proprietary information and has often leaked this information on the Internet.

LAPSUS\$ stolen credentials

In the case of Nvidia, for example, the [attackers gained access to hundreds of gigabytes of proprietary data](#), including information about chips that the company is developing. Perhaps more disturbing; however, LAPSUS\$ claims to have stolen the credentials of thousands of Nvidia employees. The exact number of credentials stolen is somewhat unclear, with various tech news sites reporting differing numbers. However, [Specops was able to obtain approximately 30,000 passwords](#) that were compromised in the breach.

The rise of cyber extortion

There are two major takeaways from the LAPSUS\$ attacks that organizations must pay attention to. First, the LAPSUS\$ attacks clearly illustrate that gangs of cybercriminals are no longer content to perform run-of-the-mill ransomware attacks. Rather than just encrypting data as has so often been done in the past, LAPSUS\$ seems far more focused on cyber extortion. LAPSUS\$ gains access to an organization's most valuable intellectual property and threatens to leak that information unless a ransom is paid.

A technology company could conceivably suffer irreparable harm by having its source code, product roadmap, or research and development data leaked, especially if that data were to be made available to competitors.

Even though the LAPSUS\$ attacks have thus far focused primarily on technology companies, any organization could conceivably become a victim of such an attack. As such, all companies must carefully consider what they can be doing to keep their most sensitive data out of the hands of cybercriminals.

Weak passwords at play

The other important takeaway from the LAPSUS\$ attacks was that while there is no definitive information about how the attackers gained access to their victim's networks, the list of leaked Nvidia credentials that was acquired by Specops clearly reveals that [many employees were using extremely weak passwords](#). Some of these passwords were common words (welcome, password, September, etc.), which are extremely susceptible to dictionary attacks. Many other passwords included the company name as a part of the password (nvidia3d, mynvidia3d, etc.). At least one employee even went so far as to use the word Nvidia as their password!

While it is entirely possible that the attackers used an initial penetration method that was not based on the use of harvested credentials, it is far more likely that these weak credentials played a pivotal role in the attack.

This, of course, raises the question of what other companies can do to prevent their employees from using similarly weak passwords, making the organization vulnerable to attack. Setting up a password policy that requires lengthy and complex passwords is a good start, but there is more that companies should be doing.

Protecting your own organization from a similar attack

One key measure that organizations can use to prevent the use of weak passwords is to create a custom dictionary of words or phrases that are not permitted to be used as a part of the password. Remember that in the Nvidia attack, employees often used the word Nvidia either as their password or as a component of their password. A custom dictionary could have been used to prevent any password from containing the word Nvidia.

	Another, even more important way that an organization can prevent the use of weak passwords is to create a policy preventing users from using any password that is known to have been leaked. When a password is leaked, that password is hashed and the hash is usually added to a database of password hashes. If an attacker acquires a password hash they can simply compare the hash to the hash database, quickly revealing the password without having to perform a time-consuming brute force or dictionary-based crack.
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HEADLINE	05/12 WordPress hacked; redirect scam sites
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2022/05/thousands-of-wordpress-sites-hacked-to.html
GIST	<p>Cybersecurity researchers have disclosed a massive campaign that's responsible for injecting malicious JavaScript code into compromised WordPress websites that redirects visitors to scam pages and other malicious websites to generate illegitimate traffic.</p> <p>"The websites all shared a common issue — malicious JavaScript had been injected within their website's files and the database, including legitimate core WordPress files," Krasimir Konov, a malware analyst at Sucuri, said in a report published Wednesday.</p> <p>This involved infecting files such as jquery.min.js and jquery-migrate.min.js with obfuscated JavaScript that's activated on every page load, allowing the attacker to redirect the website visitors to a destination of their choice.</p> <p>The GoDaddy-owned website security company said that the domains at the end of the redirect chain could be used to load advertisements, phishing pages, malware, or even trigger another set of redirects.</p> <p>In some instances, unsuspecting users are taken to a rogue redirect landing page containing a fake CAPTCHA check, clicking which serves unwanted ads that are disguised to look as if they come from the operating system and not from a web browser.</p> <p>The campaign — a continuation of another wave that was detected last month — is believed to have impacted 322 websites so far, starting May 9. The April set of attacks, on the other hand, has breached over 6,500 websites.</p> <p>"It has been found that attackers are targeting multiple vulnerabilities in WordPress plugins and themes to compromise the website and inject their malicious scripts," Konov said.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/12 Trustpilot deletes millions of fake reviews
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/trustpilot-delete-millions-fake/
GIST	<p>A leading internet reviews site was forced to pull 2.7 million entries submitted to its platform in 2021 because of fraud, a 23% increase compared to 2020.</p> <p>The figures come from Trustpilot's latest Transparency Report. It's unclear what factors accounted for the surge in takedowns: more reviews being published last year, more fraud on the site or more accurate detection.</p> <p>The actual percentage of detected fake reviews increased only slightly, from 5.7% to 5.8% of the annual total since the firm first started publishing figures in 2020. However, the number of reviews left on the site surged 21% over the period to a record 46.7 million.</p> <p>Trustpilot said 1.8 million of these takedowns were due to detections from its own technology, a 19% increase from the previous year. It also issued 121,048 warnings in 2021, a threefold increase compared to 2020.</p> <p>Other tools in the firm's arsenal include placing warning banners on erring firms' profile pages, alerting consumers when misuse has been identified on the page and cease and desist letters.</p>

	<p>Trustpilot considers a number of factors when appraising whether a review is fake or not. It could be: a business leaving a review on its own profile page; paid reviews; content deemed promotional, harmful or illegal; or reviews not based on genuine experiences. Trustpilot will also remove reviews left on competitors' sites to lower their ratings.</p> <p>"Trust in reviews remains absolutely crucial in order to ensure consumers can make more informed decisions, and businesses can demonstrate their commitment to providing a good customer experience," argued the firm's founder and CEO, Peter Muhlmann.</p> <p>However, fake online reviews are a growing problem, linked to an estimated \$152bn in global purchases each year.</p> <p>In February, Trustpilot launched its first-ever legal action against a company accused of soliciting fake reviews in order to boost its standing online.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/11 Bitter cyberspies target South Asia govts
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/bitter-cyberspies-target-south-asian-govts-with-new-malware/
GIST	<p>New activity has been observed from Bitter, an APT group focused on cyberespionage, targeting the government of Bangladesh with new malware with remote file execution capabilities.</p> <p>The campaign has been underway since at least August 2021 and constitutes a typical example of the targeting scope of Bitter, which remains unchanged since 2013.</p> <p>The discovery and details of this campaign come from threat analysts at Cisco Talos, who shared their report with BleepingComputer.</p> <p>Cisco Talos researchers attribute this campaign to Bitter based on C2 IP address overlaps with past campaigns, string encryption commonalities, and the module naming scheme.</p> <p>Infection chain</p> <p>During this campaign, which targets various organizations within the Bangladeshi government, Cisco has observed two infection chains, both starting with a spear-phishing email.</p> <p>These messages are sent via spoofed email addresses to make them appear as if they come from Pakistani government organizations.</p> <p>This was likely possible by exploiting a flaw in the Zimbra mail server that allowed attackers to send messages from a non existent email account/domain.</p> <p>The difference between the two infection chains consists in the type of file attached to the malicious email: one has an .RTF and the other an .XLSX document.</p> <p>The topics used in these emails relate to call records and number verification related to actual government operations.</p> <p>The RTF documents are weaponized to exploit CVE-2017-11882 and trigger remote code execution on machines running vulnerable Microsoft Office versions.</p> <p>"When the victim opens the RTF file with Microsoft Word, it invokes the Equation Editor application and executes the equation formula containing the Return-Oriented Programming (ROP) gadgets," - Cisco Talos</p>

"The ROP loads and executes the shellcode located at the end of the maldocs in an encrypted format that connects to the malicious host olmajhnservice[.]com and downloads the payload," the researchers explain.

In the case of the Excel spreadsheet, opening that file triggers an exploit for CVE-2018-0798 and CVE-2018-0802, which leads to remote code execution on outdated versions of the Microsoft Office.

In this case, fetching the payload is undertaken by two scheduled tasks created by the exploit that run every five minutes after the initial infection to connect to the hosting server and download the trojan.

The ZxxZ trojan

Cisco Talos named the trojan ZxxZ. It is a 32-bit Windows executable that downloads and executes modules with generic filenames such as "Update.exe", "ntfsc.exe", or "nx.exe".

These files "are either downloaded or dropped into the victim's local application data folder and run as a Windows Security update with medium integrity to elevate the privileges of a standard user," details the report.

The malware features anti-detection features such as obfuscated strings, while it also searches for the existence of Windows Defender and Kaspersky antivirus processes to kill them.

After that, an info-stealing function is activated, dumping victim profiling data into a memory buffer and sending it to the command and control server (C2). The C2 then answers with a portable executable stored in "%LOCALAPPDATA%\Debug\".

In the case of a failure to fetch that executable, the ZxxZ trojan retries 225 more times before it gives up and exits.

Bitter is still out there, refreshing their arsenal with new tools and putting more effort into evading detection.

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HEADLINE	05/11 New stealthy Nerbian RAT malware
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/new-stealthy-nerbian-rat-malware-spotted-in-ongoing-attacks/
GIST	<p>A new remote access trojan called Nerbian RAT has been discovered that includes a rich set of features, including the ability to evade detection and analysis by researchers.</p> <p>The new malware variant is written in Go, making it a cross-platform 64-bit threat, and it's currently distributed via a small-scale email distribution campaign that uses document attachments laced with macros.</p> <p>The email campaigns were discovered by researchers at Proofpoint, who released a report today on the new Nerbian RAT malware.</p> <p>Impersonating the WHO</p> <p>The malware campaign distributing Nerbian RAT impersonates the World Health Organization (WHO), which is allegedly sending COVID-19 information to the targets.</p> <p>The RAR attachments contain Word documents laced with malicious macro code, so if opened on Microsoft Office with content set to "enabled," a bat file performs a PowerShell execution step to download a 64-bit dropper.</p> <p>The dropper, named "UpdateUAV.exe," is also written in Golang and is packed in UPX to keep the size manageable.</p>

UpdateUAV reuses code from various GitHub projects to incorporate a rich set of anti-analysis and detection-evasion mechanisms before Nerbian RAT is deployed.

Apart from that, the dropper also establishes persistence by creating a scheduled task that launches that RAT every hour.

Proofpoint summarizes the list of anti-analysis tools as follows:

- Check for the existence of reverse engineering or debugging programs in the process list
- Check for suspicious MAC addresses
- Check the WMI strings to see if disk names are legitimate
- Check if the hard disk size is below 100GB, which is typical for virtual machines
- Check if there are any memory analysis or tampering detection programs present in the process list
- Check the amount of time elapsed since execution and compare it with a set threshold
- Use the IsDebuggerPresent API to determine if the executable is being debugged

All these checks make it practically impossible to get the RAT running in a sandboxed, virtualized environment, ensuring long-term stealthiness for the malware operators.

Nerbian RAT features

The trojan is downloaded as "MoUsoCore.exe" and is saved to "C:\ProgramData\USOShared\". It supports several functions, while its operators have the option to configure it with some of them.

Two of its notable functions are a keylogger that stores keystrokes in encrypted form and a screen capturing tool that works on all OS platforms.

Communications with the C2 server are handled over SSL (Secure Sockets Layer), so all data exchanges are encrypted and protected from in-transit inspection from network scanning tools.

To keep an eye on

Without a doubt, Proofpoint has spotted an interesting, complex new malware that focuses on stealthiness through numerous checks, encrypted communications, and code obfuscation.

For now, though, Nerbian RAT is distributed via low-volume email campaigns, so it's not a massive threat yet, but this could change if its authors decide to open up their business to the broader cybercrime community.

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HEADLINE	05/11 NSA: MSPs prime targets for cyberattacks
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/attacks-breaches/nsa-warns-managed-service-providers-are-now-prime-targets-for-cyberattacks
GIST	<p>The National Security Administration (NSA), along with a coalition of international cybersecurity authorities, today issued an advisory warning managed service providers (MSPs) of an escalating threat of attack from both everyday cybercriminals and state-sponsored threat actors.</p> <p>MSPs provide or operate information and communications technology services.</p> <p>With input from cybersecurity leaders from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and the US, the NSA provided recommendations to help bolster their cyber defenses, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Finding and disabling dormant accounts.• Implementing and enforcing multifactor authentication on accounts.• Ensuring contracts clearly map out who owns and is responsible for securing data. <p>“This joint guidance will help MSPs and customers engage in meaningful discussions on the responsibilities of securing networks and data,” said NSA cybersecurity director Rob Joyce in a statement</p>

	<p>announcing the new cybersecurity guidance. “Our recommendations cover actions such as preventing initial compromises and managing account authentication and authorization.”</p> <p>The NSA added it partnered with the UK's National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC-UK), the Australian Cyber Security Centre (ACSC), the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security (CCCS), New Zealand's National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC-NZ), the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Agency (CISA), and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to develop the MSP cybersecurity recommendations.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/11 IceApple deployed on Exchange servers
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2022/05/hackers-deploy-iceapple-exploitation.html?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>Researchers have detailed a previously undocumented .NET-based post-exploitation framework called IceApple that has been deployed on Microsoft Exchange server instances to facilitate reconnaissance and data exfiltration.</p> <p>"Suspected to be the work of a state-nexus adversary, IceApple remains under active development, with 18 modules observed in use across a number of enterprise environments, as of May 2022," CrowdStrike said in a Wednesday report.</p> <p>The cybersecurity firm, which discovered the sophisticated malware in late 2021, noted its presence in multiple victim networks and in geographically distinct locations. Targeted victims span a wide range of sectors, including technology, academic, and government entities.</p> <p>A post-exploitation toolset, as the name implies, is not used to provide initial access, but is rather employed to carry out follow-on attacks after having already compromised the hosts in question.</p> <p>IceApple is notable for the fact that it's an in-memory framework, indicating an attempt on the part of the threat actor to maintain a low forensic footprint and evade detection, which, in turn, bears all hallmarks of a long-term intelligence-gathering mission.</p> <p>While intrusions observed so far have involved the malware being loaded on Microsoft Exchange Servers, IceApple is capable of running under any Internet Information Services (IIS) web application, making it a potent threat.</p> <p>The different modules that come with the framework equip the malware to list and delete files and directories, write data, steal credentials, query Active Directory, and export sensitive data. Build timestamps on these components date back to May 2021.</p> <p>"At its core, IceApple is a post-exploitation framework focused on increasing an adversary's visibility of a target through acquisition of credentials and exfiltration of data," the researchers concluded.</p> <p>"IceApple has been developed by an adversary with detailed knowledge of the inner workings of IIS. Ensuring all web applications are regularly and fully patched is critical to preventing IceApple from ending up in your environment."</p>
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HEADLINE	05/11 Pro-Russia hackers target Italy websites
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/pro-russian-hackers-target-italy-defence-ministry-senate-websites-ansa-news-2022-05-11/
GIST	<p>ROME, May 11 (Reuters) - Pro-Russian hackers have attacked the websites of several Italian institutions, including the senate, ANSA news agency reported on Wednesday.</p> <p>The hacker group "Killnet" claimed the attack, ANSA said, which also targeted the National Health Institute (ISS) and the Automobile Club d'Italia, a national drivers' association.</p>

The websites of the senate, Italy's upper house of parliament, and the ISS were back online at 8.00 p.m. (1800 GMT). An hour earlier, it had been impossible to access them.

Senate speaker Elisabetta Casellati said on Twitter that the hacker attack had not caused any damage.

"These are serious incidents, which should not be underestimated," she wrote.

The defence ministry, whose website was not available, said in a statement this was "due to long-planned maintenance activities ongoing on the website".

A source at the Italian cyber security agency told Reuters they were working with the affected administrations to restore the websites, suggesting "the first appropriate technical countermeasures".

Police said an investigation was ongoing, but made no further comment.

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, many Western governments have raised alert levels in anticipation of possible cyber attacks on IT systems and infrastructure.

Late in March, Italian railway company Ferrovie dello Stato Italiane (FS) temporarily halted some ticket sale services fearing it had been targeted by a cyber attack.

In April, the ecology transition ministry said it had to shut down all its IT systems due to external threats.

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HEADLINE	05/12 Fears of turbulence cryptocurrency market
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/bitcoin-falls-to-26-000-as-crypto-selloff-intensifies-11652340653?mod=hp_lead_pos2
GIST	<p>Bitcoin plunged and the world's largest stablecoin, tether, briefly edged down from its \$1 peg, adding to fears of more turbulence in the cryptocurrency market.</p> <p>Cryptocurrencies have been hit by two forces this week. On one side, concerns that inflation will necessitate aggressive central-bank tightening have sapped the desire to hold assets perceived as higher risk. On the other, the decoupling of TerraUSD, a stablecoin whose value was tied to \$1, has sent ripples through digital assets.</p> <p>Bitcoin fell as low as \$25,402.04 Thursday, down 10% from its 5 p.m. ET level Wednesday, its lowest level since December 2020, before rebounding to about \$27,500, according to CoinDesk. Bitcoin had fallen the last seven consecutive days through Wednesday—its longest losing streak since March 2020, according to Dow Jones Market Data. Ether tumbled 8.1% from Wednesday evening to trade at \$1,867.53 Thursday—its lowest level since July 2021.</p> <p>Cryptocurrencies have come under pressure in recent days alongside stock markets. Digital assets are increasingly moving in lockstep with equities as traditional money managers such as hedge funds and family offices have entered the space during the last two years, analysts say. Such funds may be more likely to sell crypto holdings during periods of volatility rather than hold them.</p> <p>Stocks staggered Wednesday as inflation proved to be stickier than economists had anticipated, heightening concerns about how much the Federal Reserve may have to further tighten financial conditions to curb inflation. Investors are worried that aggressive interest-rate increases could weigh on growth, already a concern with Covid-19 lockdowns in some Chinese cities and the war in Ukraine.</p> <p>Crypto has also been hit by a de-pegging of what was formerly the third-largest stablecoin by market value. Billed as being the least volatile part of the crypto universe, these assets are pegged to the value of government-issued currencies. Stablecoin TerraUSD has decoupled from its \$1 peg in recent days, hitting</p>

54 cents at 3 a.m. ET Thursday. Its sister token Luna traded at 15 cents, down 97% from the previous 24 hours.

Its sister token Luna traded at 6 cents, down 99% from the previous 24 hours. The fall puts its value below dogecoin, which traded at about 8 cents at the same time.

While the most popular stablecoins maintain their levels with assets that include dollar-denominated debt and cash, TerraUSD is what is known as an algorithmic stablecoin, which relies on financial engineering to maintain its link to the dollar.

In the past, TerraUSD kept its \$1 price by relying on traders who acted as its backstop. When it fell below the peg, traders would burn the stablecoin—removing it from circulation—by exchanging TerraUSD for \$1 worth of new units of Luna. That action reduced the supply of TerraUSD and raised its price.

Conversely, when TerraUSD's value rose above \$1, traders could burn Luna and create new TerraUSD, thus increasing the supply of the stablecoin and lowering its price back toward \$1.

This system ceased to stabilize the cryptocurrency after a series of large withdrawals of TerraUSD from Anchor Protocol, a sort of decentralized bank for crypto investors. At the same time, TerraUSD was also sold for other stablecoins through various liquidity pools that contribute to the stability of the peg. The sudden rush of selling spooked some traders, who intensified the rout.

The break in TerraUSD has also caused concerns that other stablecoins could break from their typical levels. Tether, the largest stablecoin by market value, fell to 97 cents at 3 a.m. ET before rebounding to 99.6 cents at 5:15 a.m. Some hedge funds have intensified bets that tether could break from its \$1 level in recent days, investors say.

Regulators have in the past scrutinized the stablecoin, which parent company Tether Holdings Ltd. says is backed by reserves of cash or other financial instruments, [as being too opaque](#).

It took a yearslong investigation by New York's attorney general, and an eventual [\\$18.5 million settlement](#) of accusations that Tether misled clients, for Tether to reveal what it holds in only broad terms each quarter through its accounting firm. Those holdings have consisted of investments like cash and short-term U.S. government securities but also short-term IOUs known as commercial paper.

Tether hasn't disclosed which companies holdings of commercial paper came from, leading to some investor concern about the quality and stability of those firms. Tether has previously said that it has consciously reduced its commercial-paper holdings since its settlement with New York's attorney general. A spokesman for Tether didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen on Tuesday reiterated calls for Congress to [authorize regulation](#) of so-called stablecoins.

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HEADLINE	05/11 Swatting call; 'unnecessary' resource drain
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/federal-way-family-victims-of-swatting-call-it-a-waste-of-resources
GIST	<p>FEDERAL WAY, Wash. - Imagine police surrounding your house and ordering you and your kids to come out with your hands up.</p> <p>It happened to a family in Federal Way but as it turns out, they did nothing wrong.</p> <p>They and emergency responders were the victims of a fake 9-1-1 call, known publicly as "swatting."</p> <p>Federal Way police called it an unnecessary drain on the department. For them, fire, medics and for the family who did nothing wrong - it was so traumatic. All for what?</p>

“Cops showed up, asked everybody to come out of the house, put our hands up in the air,” Brian Toedtli said.

Not just him, Toedtli's sister-in-law and his three kids, the youngest is 12 years old.

Toedtli just told them to do whatever the police say, and that they were not there to cause any other trouble with whatever is started already.

'Whatever is started already' was a fake 911 call - the caller reportedly claimed they inflicted violence on their parents at the home.

South King Fire and Federal Way police responded in force.

“My 12-year-old daughter was out playing with her friends, they came running in there's like eight police cars, they have rifles, big guns, they were really scared so we locked all the doors,” Monique Rankin said.

Rankin lives across the street.

The fake 911 call, likely a caller ID spoof, came at a time when law enforcement is coping with staffing shortages across the region.

Including Federal Way police, a spokesperson says they have 10 police openings and 25 new hires not on the street yet, either in field training or in the academy.

“All the resources they used, there was I think I counted two police per eight cars, 16 police, what a waste of time,” Rankin said.

South King Fire tweeted this: “unfortunately a lot of resources pulled out of position for a fake 911 call.”

“The police are already really busy,” Rankin added. “They can't come on regular days.”

She says her daughter's parked car was recently damaged by a hit and run driver, but police could not respond - she had to file a report online.

Swatting, a waste of resources, but traumatic and risky. It's not lost on anyone that someone could have been hurt.

“A waste of resources and time and someone that really needed help probably couldn't get help right then,” Toedtli said.

This kind of crime is often hard to prosecute, since 2019 there have been nearly a dozen federal convictions nationwide.

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HEADLINE	05/11 Bitcoin acting like just another tech stock
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/11/technology/bitcoin-price-crashing-stocks.html
GIST	<p>SAN FRANCISCO — Bitcoin was conceived more than a decade ago as “digital gold,” a long-term store of value that would resist broader economic trends and provide a hedge against inflation.</p> <p>But bitcoin's crashing price over the past month shows that vision is a long way from reality. Instead, traders are increasingly treating the cryptocurrency like just another speculative tech investment.</p> <p>Since the start of this year, bitcoin's price movement has closely mirrored that of the Nasdaq, a bench mark that's heavily weighted toward technology stocks, according to an analysis by the data firm Arcane Research. That means that as bitcoin's price dropped more than 25% over the past month, to under</p>

\$30,000 on Wednesday — less than half its November peak — the plunge came in near lock step with a broader collapse of tech stocks as investors grappled with higher interest rates and the war in Ukraine.

The growing correlation helps explain why those who bought the cryptocurrency last year, hoping it would grow more valuable, have seen their investment crater. And while bitcoin has always been volatile, its increasing resemblance to risky tech stocks starkly shows that its promise as a transformative asset remains unfulfilled.

“It delegitimizes the argument that bitcoin is like gold,” said Vetle Lunde, an analyst for Arcane. “Evidence points in favor of bitcoin just being a risk asset.”

Arcane Research assigned a numeric score between 1 and -1 to capture the pricing correlation between bitcoin and the Nasdaq. A score of 1 indicated an exact correlation, meaning the prices moved in tandem, and a score of -1 represented an exact divergence.

Since Jan. 1, the 30-day average of the bitcoin-Nasdaq score has approached 1, reaching 0.82 this week, the closest it had ever been to an exact, 1-to-1 correlation. At the same time, bitcoin’s price movement has diverged from fluctuations in the price of gold, the asset to which it has been most often compared.

The convergence with the Nasdaq has grown over the course of the coronavirus pandemic, driven partly by institutional investors like hedge funds, endowments and family offices that have poured money into the cryptocurrency market.

Unlike the idealists who drove the initial enthusiasm for bitcoin in the 2010s, these professional traders are treating the cryptocurrency as part of a larger portfolio of high-risk, high-reward tech investments. Some of them are under pressure to secure short-term returns for clients and are less ideologically committed to bitcoin’s long-term potential. And when they lose faith in the tech industry more broadly, that affects their bitcoin trades.

“Five years ago, people who were in crypto were crypto people,” said Mike Boroughs, a founder of the blockchain investment fund Fortis Digital. “Now you’ve got guys who are across the whole span of risk assets. So when they’re getting hit over there, it’s impacting their psychology.”

Worries in the stock market — affected by challenging economic trends, including Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the historic levels of inflation — have particularly manifested themselves in falling tech stocks this year. Meta, the company formerly known as Facebook, is down more than 40% this year. Netflix has lost 70% of its value.

On Wednesday, shares of Coinbase, the cryptocurrency exchange, plummeted 26% after it reported declining revenue and a loss of \$430 million in the first quarter. The company’s stock has fallen more than 75% overall this year.

The Nasdaq is already in bear-market territory, having ended Wednesday down 29% from its mid-November record. November was also when bitcoin’s price hit a peak of nearly \$70,000. The crash has been a reality check for bitcoin evangelists.

“There was this undeniable retail belief that bitcoin at the end of last year was an inflation hedge — it was a safe haven, it was going to replace the dollar,” said Ed Moya, a cryptocurrency analyst at the trading company OANDA. “And what happened was inflation started to become very ugly, and bitcoin lost half of its value.”

The prices of other cryptocurrencies have also been crushed. The price of ether, the second-most valuable cryptocurrency, has dropped about 25% just since early April, to under \$2,300. Others, like solana and cardano, have also experienced precipitous drops this year.

	<p>Bitcoin has rebounded from major losses before, and its long-term growth remains impressive. Before the pandemic boom in crypto prices, its value hovered well below \$10,000. True believers, who call themselves bitcoin maximalists, remain adamant that the cryptocurrency will eventually break from its correlation with risk assets.</p> <p>Michael Saylor, the CEO of the business-intelligence company MicroStrategy, has spent billions of his firm's money on bitcoin, building up a stockpile of more than 125,000 coins. As the price of bitcoin has cratered, the company's stock has dropped roughly 75% since November.</p> <p>In an email, Saylor blamed the crash on "traders and technocrats" who don't appreciate bitcoin's long-term potential to transform the global financial system.</p> <p>"In the near term, the market will be dominated by those with less appreciation of the virtues of bitcoin," he said. "Over the long term, the maximalists will be proven correct, because billions of people need this solution, and awareness is spreading to millions more each month."</p>
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Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	05/12 Togo suffers first deadly jihadist attack
SOURCE	https://www.theafricareport.com/203218/togo-suffers-its-first-deadly-jihadist-attack/ https://issafrica.org/iss-today/west-african-coastal-terror-attacks-just-the-tip-of-the-iceberg
GIST	<p>It was probably only a matter of time, as terrorist groups are targeting the countries of the subregion one by one.</p> <p>On the night of 10-11 May, at around 3 am, a military post in the locality of Kpékpakandi, not far from the border with Burkina Faso, was attacked. For the first time in a terrorist attack, there were casualties among the army.</p> <p>According to our information, the heavily armed assailants arrived in dozens, perched on motorcycles, and opened fire on the Togolese military. An exchange of fire ensued, but the surprise effect played in the attackers' favour, and they managed to take control of the post.</p> <p>Images showing the violence are already circulating on social media, such as those showing a burned pickup and a wounded soldier being chased.</p> <hr/> <p>Togo suffered its first-ever attack when assailants raided a security post in the northern border village of Sanloaga on 9 November 2021. Then, according to Togo's Security and Civil Protection Minister Yark Damehame, suspected militants ordered residents of Lalabiga village in the Savanes region to leave within 72 hours on 19 February. In Côte d'Ivoire, at least 11 soldiers were killed or injured in multiple attacks in the first half of 2021.</p> <p>Coastal states have hit back mostly through military operations, which they have conducted nationally, bilaterally or collectively within the framework of the Accra Initiative. The last one, Operation Koudanlgou 4 Zone 2, conducted in November 2021, involved Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo. About 6 000 soldiers were reportedly deployed and 300 suspected extremists arrested.</p> <p>Now responses could be reinforced by the planned withdrawal of Barkhane and Takuba forces from Mali, with their redeployment to Niger and the Gulf of Guinea. Coastal leaders participated in the 17 February press conference when French President Emmanuel Macron announced the exit. This could see further militarisation in states' responses, anchored in a narrow interpretation of the spillover as simply a southward spread of attacks.</p>

Counter-terrorism officials are starting to acknowledge that coastal state citizens have been recruited to fight in the Sahel and beyond. Yet there's little focus on how this is organised, who the actors are, the profiles of those recruited, the locations where recruitment takes place, and the strategies for tackling them.

Key coastal stakeholders mainly view violent extremism as an external threat involving attackers from the Sahel. This deflects attention from local vulnerabilities that violent extremists could exploit.

Explosive materials used at sites in some coastal states may be going up north to terror groups. Like in the Sahel, local conflicts in coastal states can serve as entry points for violent extremist groups, who pose as arbiters or supporters of various sides. Also, in border communities, especially where basic infrastructure or public services are lacking, violent extremists gain support by delivering such services, including security.

The spillover is also often thought to be linear in direction, occurring only from north to south. But violent extremists mobilise resources along east-west and other routes too. For example, motorbikes – vital for navigating difficult terrain – are trafficked from Nigeria through Benin and Togo to western Burkina Faso and south-eastern Niger.

There are also indications that gold buyers from Togo and Benin are accessing some gold mining sites controlled by violent extremists in the Sahel. Explosive materials used at sites in some coastal states may be going up north to terror groups. In 2018, electric cord seized by Burkinabe officials during a counter-terrorism operation in Ouagadougou was traced to a mining site in northern Ghana.

A largely militarised response to violent extremism could provoke retaliatory attacks. The June 2020 Kafolo assault in Côte d'Ivoire followed the country's joint Operation Comoé with Burkina Faso three weeks earlier. Before it happened, Jama'at Nusratul Islam wal Muslimin, an al-Qaeda offshoot, reportedly referred to the operation and hinted at an attack on Côte d'Ivoire through its propaganda news platform, Thabat News Agency.

Before Barkhane's southward redeployment, coastal states need a better understanding of the spillover. The targeting of security posts and patrols in Benin and Togo suggests groups may be reacting to recent operations – although Institute for Security Studies research shows limited evidence of a link. The assaults may also be an attempt to test the capacity of defence and security forces, protect resource supply routes, or even free up corridors for terrorist activities.

Coastal states might try to counter violent extremists' activities by imposing curfews, closing markets and restricting people's movements. After the Sanloaga attack, local authorities in northern Togo discouraged traders from visiting markets close to the Burkina Faso border. These controls could disrupt violent extremists' supply chains, but they also constrain local livelihoods.

These measures also breed community resentment against national authorities, especially in areas long neglected by the state. This could endear violent extremists to communities, especially if the terrorists offer them alternative sources of livelihood.

Coastal states should identify risks and lessons learnt from their counter-terrorism strategies so far and adapt accordingly. This is especially important as Barkhane and Takuba are redeployed southwards. Strategies for tackling supply chains should include joint planning and cross-border coordination, otherwise violent extremists faced with blockades will simply choose alternative routes.

To break violent extremists' supply chains, communities must be involved on an ongoing basis. This is key to avoiding unintended consequences, particularly the disruption of livelihoods, which push resentful people into the arms of terrorists.

HEADLINE	05/11 Intelligence chiefs: Afghan terrorist threat
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/policy/defense-national-security/intelligence-community-chiefs-give-update-on-afghan-terrorist-threat
GIST	<p>Terrorist organizations within Afghanistan's borders are still roughly a year or more away from having the capability to launch attacks against Western countries, though intelligence officials remain concerned about the possibility.</p> <p>Defense officials told lawmakers in the fall that groups like al Qaeda and Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISIS-K) could gain that ability within six to 12 months, but Defense Department and intelligence leaders have pushed that back.</p> <p>Lt. Gen. Scott Berrier, the director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, testified in front of the Senate Armed Services Committee on Tuesday and said the threat from ISIS-K could take “a year, slightly longer, and longer for al Qaeda.”</p> <p>He is “more concerned about ISIS-K in Afghanistan and the fact that they have had known successful and catastrophic attacks in Canada, which does not portend well for the future,” the DIA chief explained.</p> <p>“Al Qaeda has had some problems with reconstituting leadership, and to a degree, the Taliban have held to their word about not allowing al Qaeda [to] rejuvenate,” Berrier added. “But it’s something that we’re watching very, very carefully.”</p> <p>Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines, who testified alongside Berrier, agreed with his assessment, acknowledging that ISIS-K is “the more concerning threat.”</p> <p>The DNI does not “assess that they currently have the capability to” launch attacks against the United States, though Haines noted, “They could build that capability over time, and they certainly have the intent to do so.”</p> <p>Last month, retired Gen. Frank McKenzie, then the head of U.S. Central Command, told the committee that DOD believed ISIS-K would have “external attack capability” in “12 to 18 months.”</p> <p>“The figure that the period I gave, which is 12 to 18 months, for ISIS-K represents our best whole of intelligence community thinking on this, and it does change over time as we see groups gather, as we see groups fall apart, but I’ll be able to give you a lot more detail on that in the closed session,” he explained.</p> <p>Dr. Colin Kahl, the undersecretary of defense for policy, told the committee in October that ISIS-K could “generate that capability in somewhere between six or 12 months, according to current assessments by the intelligence committee,” while “for al Qaeda, it would take a year or two to reconstitute that capability.”</p> <p>The United States withdrew from Afghanistan, ending its 20-year occupation in the Middle Eastern country, at the end of August — but not without controversy. The Taliban almost immediately overthrew the U.S.-backed Ghani administration, catching U.S. officials by surprise. Western countries, in the two-week period after the Taliban's ascension to power and the end of their presence on the ground, conducted a large-scale evacuation effort, in which they were able to help more than 100,000 people who thought they would be at risk under the Taliban regime leave the country, though many others, including Afghans who helped the U.S., were left behind.</p> <p>Without forces in Afghanistan, the U.S. intends to rely on over-the-horizon strike capabilities, though not having assets to gain real-time intelligence makes it harder to launch a strike.</p> <p>Earlier this month, Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told lawmakers that he believed the U.S. has “room to improve” its over-the-horizon capabilities, but he didn’t elaborate.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/12 UN: terrorism resurgent in Afghanistan
SOURCE	https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/957044-terrorism-resurgent-in-afghanistan-says-guterres
GIST	<p>UNITED NATIONS: The continued expansion of Da'esh and Al-Qaeda in Africa and resurgent terrorism in Afghanistan pose a growing threat to global peace and security, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told the UN-backed counter-terrorism meeting opened in Malaga, Spain, on Tuesday. "Responses to terrorism must be anchored in the rule of law, human rights, and gender equality to ensure their effectiveness," he stressed.</p> <p>"As a moral duty, let's put human rights where they belong: front and centre in the fight against terror," the secretary-general said in a video message to the high-level international conference on human rights and counter-terrorism meeting. The two-day event is taking place against the backdrop of the growing threat of terrorism across the globe, and the resulting increase in related legislation and policies. During the conference, governments, international organizations, civil society and human rights defenders examined how to formulate terrorism responses that comply with human rights and the rule of law and ensure meaningful participation of civil society in counter-terrorism efforts.</p> <p>"This gathering reflects a central truth. Terrorism is not only an attack on innocent people. It represents an all-out assault on human rights," the secretary-general said.</p> <p>"The threat is growing and global," he said. "Da'esh and Al-Qaeda continue to expand into Africa. Terrorism is resurgent in Afghanistan. Extremist groups target women and girls with gender-based violence, including sexual violence." Terrorists, he said, were also using technology to "spread and export lies, hatred and division at the touch of a button".</p> <p>Going on, he said, xenophobia, racism and cultural and religious intolerance were accelerating. Guterres warned that at the same time, global responses to terrorism could make things worse.</p> <p>"In the name of security, humanitarian aid is often blocked – increasing human suffering. Civil society and human rights defenders are silenced – particularly women. And survivors of terrorism and violence are left without the support and access to justice they need to rebuild their lives," he said.</p> <p>The secretary-general called for reaffirming commitment to core values, including investing in health, education, protection, gender equality, and justice systems that were accessible to all people.</p> <p>"This must also include safeguarding humanitarian action, respecting international law and opening the door to civil society – and especially women – to meaningfully engage with counter-terrorism efforts."</p> <p>The high-level conference is jointly organized by the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) and Spain. In his opening remarks, Vladimir Voronkov, UN Under-Secretary-General for Counter-Terrorism, stressed that "countering terrorism helps protect human rights, but only if human rights are protected while countering terrorism."</p>
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HEADLINE	05/11 Mixed verdict NY terrorism case
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/wireStory/jury-returns-mixed-verdict-york-terrorism-case-84657051
GIST	<p>NEW YORK -- A Manhattan federal court jury returned a mixed verdict Wednesday in the trial of a New Jersey software developer who authorities say researched and photographed U.S. landmarks for possible attacks.</p> <p>The jury was unable to reach a verdict on one terrorism charge — providing material support for a terrorist group — but found Alexei Saab, 44, had received military-type training from Hezbollah's Islamic Jihad Organization, which is based in Lebanon.</p> <p>Saab was also found guilty of conspiring to commit marriage fraud and making false statements. The Morristown, New Jersey, resident was exonerated on three other charges after a two-week trial.</p>

Saab's lawyer, Marlon Kirton, said much of the evidence came from what Saab himself told FBI investigators that was "un-credible, crazy, unsubstantiated information," and which can't be considered reliable.

Saab spoke with the FBI in 11 sessions over several weeks prior to his 2019 arrest, but was never read his rights, Kirton said in an email after the verdict.

U.S. Attorney Damian Williams highlighted the jury's unanimous verdict that Saab was trained by a terrorist organization.

"The evidence at trial showed that Saab surveilled some of New York's most iconic and highly trafficked locations," Williams said in a statement, "in order to provide critical intelligence on how they could be most effectively attacked."

Judge Paul G. Gardephe questioned whether the terrorism count conviction will stand based on rules about how the statute of limitations pertains to terrorism charges. He asked lawyers on both sides to submit written arguments within weeks about the charge, which has a potential maximum penalty of 10 years in prison.

Gardephe said he wanted to know if it was the intent of Congress that there would be no limit to how long the government could wait to bring charges against someone who received military-type training from a terrorist organization.

Prosecutors were also given a week to decide whether to seek a retrial on the material support charge, which carries a potential penalty of up to 20 years in prison.

The other two convictions for conspiring to commit marriage fraud and making false statements each carry a potential penalty of up to five years in prison.

Prosecutors say that, according to Saab, he joined Hezbollah in 1996 and once tried to kill a man he later understood to be a suspected Israeli spy by pointing a weapon at the individual at close range, but the firearm jammed. They said he surveilled potential targets for terrorism attacks from 2000 to 2005 while working by day as a technology software engineer.

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HEADLINE	05/11 IS: 'revenge' execution of Nigerians
SOURCE	https://thetreetjournal.org/is-release-video-showing-revenge-execution-of-nigerians/
GIST	<p>The Islamic State (IS) group has published a video that shows the execution of about 20 Christian civilians in northeast Nigeria's Borno State, BBC reported.</p> <p>One of the masked militants who spoke in Hausa language during the execution said it was to avenge the killing of the group's leaders in the Middle East earlier in 2022.</p> <p>The video was published on an IS-linked news outlet and shows three groups of captives in civilian clothes. The time of the video and location of execution is however unknown.</p> <p>Nigerian authorities are also yet to speak on the video. Its authenticity, however, was confirmed by SITE Intelligence.</p> <p>IS leader Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurashi died in February during a brazen nighttime airborne raid carried out by the United States special forces in northwestern Syria. The operation, in which Kurdish forces also took part, was conducted in the Idlib region where his better-known predecessor Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was killed in a similar raid in 2019.</p>

Qurashi, who was also known as Amir Mohammed Said Abd al-Rahman al-Mawla, replaced Baghdadi after his death in a US raid in October 2019, and had a reputation for brutality.

The IS militants operate in the Lake Chad region under the name Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), along with another Islamist militant group, Boko Haram, have recently suffered huge losses as a result of attacks by a multi-national military force.

Boko Haram jihadist group in June 2021 confirmed the death of its chief Abubakar Shekau, who sources say died during infighting with the rival Islamic State-allied faction, according to a video message from its presumed new commander.

Shekau's death has since caused a huge division amongst the ranks of Boko Haram with some of its commanders pleading loyalty to ISWAP. This caused a major shift in Nigeria's conflict, though Islamic State in West Africa Province or ISWAP has recently emerged as the dominant force in the more than decade-long Islamist insurgency in the country's northeast.

The conflict has claimed the lives of thousands and displaced millions of residents who are taking refuge in IDP camps. Nigeria's President Muhammadu Buhari in mid-2021 ordered an improved military action against the terrorist which has led to hundreds of terrorists surrendering, according to the army.

The repentant terrorists are enrolled in Nigeria's rehabilitation and deradicalisation and reintegration programmes. Borno state Governor Babagana Zulum during the visit of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres visit to Nigeria said at least 40,000 Boko Haram fighters and their families have surrendered to authorities since 2021 after the death of Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau.

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HEADLINE	05/11 US: Africa main target of IS group
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/ministers-meet-morocco-discuss-ongoing-threat-84642299
GIST	<p>RABAT, Morocco -- A senior U.S. official said Wednesday the world must remain vigilant about the continued threat posed by the Islamic State group around the globe — especially in Africa — a reminder of an unfinished war despite the overwhelming preoccupation with the conflict in Ukraine.</p> <p>Victoria Nuland, the U.S. undersecretary of state for political affairs, said the threat from IS was particularly high on the African continent, which she said saw nearly 500 IS terrorist incidents in 2021 resulting in the deaths of more than 2,900 people.</p> <p>“At the same time as we are preventing the resurgence of (IS) in Iraq and Syria, we need to remain vigilant to the continued threat it poses elsewhere in the world, especially here on the African continent,” she said.</p> <p>Nuland spoke at the opening session in the Moroccan city of Marrakech of the annual gathering of members of the global anti-IS coalition. She is co-chairing this year's meeting of the 8-year-old, 83-member bloc with Moroccan Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita. The gathering aims to reaffirm attendees' shared determination to continue fighting IS.</p> <p>Nuland, the third highest-ranking U.S. diplomat, replaced Secretary of State Antony Blinken who tested positive for COVID-19.</p> <p>IS at the height of its power controlled more than 40,000 square miles (103,600 square kilometers) stretching from Syria to Iraq and ruled over 8 million people. It lost its last patch of territory in eastern Syria in March 2019 following a years-long global fight against the group.</p> <p>Since that time, it has largely gone underground and waged a low-level insurgency, including roadside bombings, assassinations and hit-and-run attacks mostly targeting security forces in Iraq and Syria.</p> <p>In recent months, the group has exploited economic collapse, lack of governance and growing ethnic tensions in the impoverished region to reverse counter-IS gains. Its attacks in the region included a major</p>

assault earlier this year to seize a prison in northeast Syria holding at least 3,000 IS detainees. In Afghanistan, IS militants have stepped up attacks on the country's new rulers, the Taliban, as well as religious and ethnic minorities.

The group has claimed several attacks in Israel recently, and an Islamic State affiliate in Egypt on Sunday claimed an attack that targeted a water pumping station east of the Suez Canal, killing at least 11 soldiers.

"We remain clear on the state of the (IS) threat, which has not diminished," said Bourita, warning that Africa has become the group's main target, suffering 41% of all IS attacks worldwide.

Militants pledging allegiance to the Islamic State group remain active in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, where they have been blamed for scores of attacks on villages that have killed hundreds of civilians. Islamic extremists in Nigeria also have carried out violence under the banner of a group they call the Islamic State West Africa Province. More recently, IS-affiliated militants have claimed responsibility for deadly violence targeting Congolese soldiers and bars in the country's embattled east.

Mozambique's extremist rebels are also aligned with the IS group and announced this week it is known as the Islamic State Mozambique Province.

This year's meeting is taking place to the backdrop of significant other international priorities, including the devastating war in Ukraine, fallout from the coronavirus pandemic and stepping up the fight against climate change.

Moroccan media report that some 80 countries would be represented at the gathering Monday. Delegates will also discuss ways to prevent a resurgence in Iraq and Syria by stabilizing liberated areas and pursuing sustainable solutions for IS detainees and their family members, as well as countering IS networks on the African continent and elsewhere.

The Moroccan government said it hopes the meeting will result in increased international commitment and cooperation in the fight against IS, with a particular focus on Africa and the growing terrorist threat in the Middle East and other countries.

Numerous Moroccans have traveled to Syria, Iraq and elsewhere to join extremist groups in recent years. Morocco has also experienced multiple attacks itself. Five suicide attacks in Casablanca in 2003 killed 33 people. In 2011, an explosion destroyed a cafe in Marrakech, killing 17 people, most of them foreign tourists.

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HEADLINE	05/11 Egypt: second deadly attack north Sinai
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/five-egyptian-troops-killed-attack-north-sinai-peninsula-sources-2022-05-11/
GIST	<p>CAIRO, May 11 (Reuters) - Five Egyptian soldiers were killed by militants on Wednesday in northern Sinai, the second deadly strike against security forces on the peninsula in less than a week, and the military said it had carried out air strikes in response.</p> <p>Four others were injured when armed men opened fire early on Wednesday morning at a security post on the coast of northeastern Sinai a few kilometres away from the border with the Gaza Strip, two security sources said.</p> <p>The deaths follow a May 7 ambush at a checkpoint in Sinai that killed 11 Egyptian soldiers and was claimed by Islamic State, one of the deadliest attacks in recent years.</p> <p>The military said in a statement that it had carried out air strikes on May 7 and again on Wednesday, killing a total of 16 militants and destroying several of their outposts and vehicles.</p>

	<p>The five soldiers, including one officer, had been killed defending the security post from attack, it said, putting the number of wounded soldiers at two and adding that a further seven militants had been killed in the clashes.</p> <p>Egypt has expanded security control over populated coastal areas of northern Sinai since a major counter-insurgency operation was launched in 2018, but sporadic attacks by militants linked to Islamic State have continued. read more</p> <p>Southern Sinai, which is popular with foreign tourists and is separated from the north by mountains and desert, has been stable.</p> <p>News of Wednesday's attack came as President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi met U.S. national security advisor Jake Sullivan in Cairo. The Egyptian presidency said the two had discussed the strategic partnership between Egypt and the United States, which is a major provider of military aid to Cairo.</p> <p>On Monday, Sisi voiced hopes for deeper counter-terrorism ties with Washington in a meeting with the general who oversees U.S. forces in the Middle East, a U.S. military official said.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/11 Study: terrorists embrace climate change
SOURCE	https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/uk-news/2022/05/11/terrorists-embrace-climate-change-to-fuel-extremist-violence/
GIST	<p>The climate crisis could lead to a rising threat of catastrophic terrorist attacks sparked by a new refugee crisis as people are forced to flee their homes, researchers warned.</p> <p>Climate change has inflamed tensions in flashpoint areas with the deadly effects of human conflict expected to increase in parallel with increased natural disasters, extreme weather conditions and the loss of cultivatable land, according to a new report.</p> <p>The study, by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (Start), said that violent extremist groups were trying to radicalise people who had lost their livelihoods to climate change.</p> <p>Far-right groups have also embraced “eco-fascism” to exploit culture clashes between ethnic groups as populations are forced to leave their traditional homes in a search for new land to ensure their long-term survival.</p> <p>The greatest driver of climate-change-linked terrorism comes from the expected surge of refugees and the struggle for control of scarce resources, Bill Braniff, the director of Start, told an online insurance conference.</p> <p>“This is a recipe for incredibly violent outcomes,” he told a session of the annual conference of The International Forum of Terrorism Risk (Re)Insurance Pools (Iftrip).</p> <p>He cited the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people in sectarian clashes sparked by the mass migration of Muslims or Hindus after the partition of India in 1947.</p> <p>He also said that ISIS had exploited the climate change crisis to recruit people in Iraq, where changing weather patterns had prevented them from earning livelihoods from the land.</p> <p>The UN says armed extremist groups such as ISIS, Boko Haram and Al Shabab thrive in communities stricken by drought and other harsh climatic conditions, where joblessness and despair leave people vulnerable to hardliners.</p>

The greatest threats from terrorism will likely be felt in areas that are already hotbeds of radicalisation and extremism, Andrew Silke, professor of terrorism, risk and resilience at Cranfield Forensic Institute, told the conference.

“Once you throw climate change into the mix, it accelerates all the existing causes you have in a region and makes things much, much worse than they would be otherwise,” he said.

The researchers said that terrorist attacks would not be limited to the places worst affected by climate change. Growing global inequality could lead to violent groups taking revenge on industrialised nations most to blame for causing climate change.

ISIS’s propaganda wing produced a video in 2020 inspired by the California wildfires, urging its supporters to set fires on the US west coast to cause maximum economic damage in reprisal for its involvement in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Scenarios investigated by researchers included increasingly militant environmental action groups, attacks on countries seen as being most to blame for climate change, and far-right groups linking migration to the destruction of habitats.

“As climate change creates climate refugees, estimated to be in the hundreds of millions by 2050, there will be a massive pushback, fuelled in part by fears that anti-western terrorists are among those climate refugees,” Mr Braniff said.

“These related scenarios are a recipe for mass radicalisation, should they come to fruition,” he said. “Frequency of low-level terrorist attacks will increase and the potential for catastrophic attacks will also increase.”

Russia last year [vetoed a draft UN Security Council resolution](#) that would have ranked climate change as a threat to international peace and security.

Led by Niger and Ireland, a proposal backed by the UAE and 112 other UN members described climate change as a trigger for wars and hoped to push the issue higher up the council’s agenda.

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HEADLINE	05/11 ISIS in Africa behind surge of attacks
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/05/11/isis-africa-attacks/
GIST	<p>MARRAKESH, Morocco — The Islamic State’s regional affiliates in Africa are carrying out lethal attacks at a tempo far surpassing that of the parent organization that once ruled large swaths of Iraq and Syria, Morocco’s chief diplomat said Wednesday at a meeting of the global alliance battling the militant group.</p> <p>Sub-Saharan Africa, home to several branches of the Islamic State, now accounts for nearly half of all deaths worldwide attributed to the terrorist group, Moroccan Minister of Foreign Affairs Nasser Bourita said.</p> <p>“We remain lucid on the state of the ISIS threat, which has not diminished,” said Bourita, whose country is hosting a conference of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. He said that sub-Saharan Africa accounts for 48 percent, or 3,461, of the deaths worldwide attributed to ISIS in 2021.</p> <p>“Today, 27 terrorist entities based in Africa are registered on the U.N. Security Council sanction list,” Bourita said. “This is a clear indicator of their connections to major global terrorist groups.”</p> <p>Secretary of State Antony Blinken had planned to attend the meeting here, but canceled after testing positive for covid-19. Victoria Nuland, undersecretary for political affairs, and Yael Lempert, acting assistant secretary for Near Eastern affairs, led the U.S. delegation.</p>

The Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS was established in September 2014 and is composed of 85 states and international partner organizations.

Nuland said in her remarks that ISIS has been considerably weakened in Iraq and Syria, but [continues to seek opportunities to reconstitute itself](#). “From the need for increased humanitarian services for the nearly 60,000 people at al-Hol camp, to developing appropriate solutions for youth in detention, to improving the security solutions for the thousands of foreign terrorist fighters and family members awaiting repatriation to their home countries, there is more work to be done by members of the coalition,” she said.

U.S. officials said they are hoping that European allies will repatriate their nationals from the al-Hol refugee camp in Syria, which officials said has become a center of violence, misery and radicalization.

Nuland also noted that ISIS and other terrorist groups have increased their influence and capabilities in West Africa.

“The United States is committed to working with our partners in West Africa to confront the challenges that have allowed these groups to flourish, among them lack of state legitimacy, persistent rights violations and food insecurity,” she said. “In response to this and other security threats, the United States will spend over \$119 million in new assistance in sub-Saharan Africa to improve the capabilities of civilian law enforcement and the judiciary to disrupt, apprehend, prosecute and convict terrorists across the continent.”

Bourita said terrorist groups, once limited to the rural interior, have reached the Atlantic coast in West Africa, threatening shipping routes. And, he said, the kind of piracy that has plagued the Horn of Africa is emerging in the Gulf of Guinea.

The global coalition earlier this year created the Africa Focus Group, led by the United States, Italy, Niger and Morocco.

In recent weeks, the Islamic State’s affiliates in West Africa and a northern swath of the continent known as Sahel have carried out several attacks. On May 10, Amaq, a news agency affiliated with ISIS, released a video of fighters executing more than a dozen Nigerian Christians to avenge the deaths of former leaders, according to the SITE Intelligence Group, which monitors terrorist organizations globally.

“While most people in the world are concentrating on [the war in Ukraine](#) or covid, ISIS and other militant groups are using the time to gain new strength and build new alliances,” said an Arab intelligence official who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive assessments. The official also warned that the war in Ukraine is leading to food price hikes and hunger in Africa, potentially drawing more people to radical groups.

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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	05/11 Growing child hepatitis mystery
SOURCE	https://arstechnica.com/science/2022/05/450-cases-11-dead-worldwide-in-growing-child-hepatitis-mystery/
GIST	<p>The global tally of unexplained hepatitis cases in children has reached about 450, including 11 reported deaths, according to an update from the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control.</p> <p>The cases come from more than two dozen countries around the world, with about 14 countries reporting more than five cases. The countries with the largest case counts so far are the United Kingdom and the United States.</p> <p>In the UK, officials have identified 163 cases in children under the age of 16, 11 of whom required liver transplants. Last week, the US Centers for Disease Control reported 109 cases under investigation in</p>

children under the age of 10 from 25 states. Of those cases, 14 percent required liver transplants, and five children died.

Fourteen countries in the European Union reported about 106 cases collectively, with Italy (35) and Spain (22) reporting the largest tallies of EU member countries. Outside the EU, officials have reported cases in Argentina (8), Brazil (16), Canada (7), Costa Rica (2), Indonesia (15), Israel (12), Japan (7), Panama (1), Palestine (1), Serbia (1), Singapore (1), and South Korea (1).

The 11 deaths were reported in Indonesia (5), Palestine (1), and the US (5).

The cause of the severe hepatitis—liver inflammation—remains a mystery, despite the growing tally. Some of the cases have been identified retrospectively, dating back to October 1, 2021.

Health officials worldwide have been on the lookout for child cases of acute hepatitis that can't be explained by common culprits, such as hepatitis viruses A, B, C, D, and E, which are known to injure the liver. Those with cases also have elevated levels of liver enzymes.

"At present, the leading hypotheses remain those which involve adenovirus," Philippa Easterbrook, a senior scientist with the World Health Organization, said Tuesday in [a press briefing](#). "But," she added, "I think [there's] also still an important consideration about the role of COVID as well, either as a co-infection or as a past infection."

Easterbrook noted that about 70 percent of the cases that have been tested for an adenovirus have tested positive, and subtype testing continues to commonly turn up adenovirus type 41.

Data coming soon

Adenoviruses are not known to cause hepatitis in healthy children, though the large family of viruses has previously been linked to liver damage in children with compromised immune systems. Adenoviruses often cause common respiratory infections in healthy children, while type 41 is linked to gastrointestinal illness.

Liver biopsy data so far has not turned up adenovirus in the livers of affected children, raising further questions. Moreover, adenoviruses are quite common in children, and some of the hepatitis cases occurred while adenovirus transmission in the general population was high. This raises the possibility that the detection of adenovirus is merely incidental and not the cause of the liver injuries.

In the press briefing Tuesday, Easterbrook noted the possibility, saying, "Hopefully, within the week, there will be data from the UK on [an] important case control study comparing whether the detection rate of adeno in the children with liver disease differs from that in other hospitalized children. That will really help hone down whether adeno is just an incidental infection that has been detected or there is a causal or likely causal link."

Otherwise, officials have reported that the cases are sporadic and unlinked, with no known common exposures to medicines, foods, drinks, toxic substances, or travel. The US CDC has also ruled out bacterial infections, urinary tract infections, autoimmune hepatitis, and a rare genetic condition called Wilson disease, based on data from cases in Alabama.

According to Easterbrook, testing has found that about 18 percent of cases are positive for SARS-CoV-2. However, the [US CDC has ruled out SARS-CoV-2 as a possible direct cause](#) of the cases, noting that the first [nine cases identified in Alabama were all negative for the virus](#). In a press briefing last week, CDC Deputy Director for Infectious Diseases Jay Butler said that the agency is still keeping open the possibility that previous SARS-CoV-2 infections could play a role in the cases. Studies looking at past infections of SARS-CoV-2 in affected children are now ongoing in the US and elsewhere.

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SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/state/washington/article261308572.html
GIST	<p>About 555,000 acres of forests in Washington were damaged by last year's intense summer heat, foliar diseases and beetles, according to the Department of Natural Resources.</p> <p>DNR surveyed approximately 19 million acres of land in the state and released the report of their 2021 findings on Tuesday. The U.S. Forest Service helped the agency conduct the aerial survey, which is done every year.</p> <p>"This comprehensive accounting makes clear the impacts our worsening climate crisis have on our forests and the urgency of our efforts to combat our forest health crisis in Washington," Public Lands Commissioner Hilary Franz said in a news release Tuesday.</p> <p>Western Washington was the most affected by the heat from last summer, according to the report. The western side of the Olympic Peninsula, western Pacific County, Wahkiakum County, southern Clark and Skamania counties, and the foothills of Snohomish, King, and Lewis counties were the areas most impacted, with nearly 84,000 acres of damage.</p> <p>The number could still be higher "because crown discoloration was difficult to see by observers looking to the west and south," the report noted.</p> <p>Those trees were affected by "desiccation damage," which is what happens when they lose moisture before turning brown and eventually dying.</p> <p>Beetles caused their fair share of damage to Washington forests last year too, the report adds.</p> <p>Although damage from pine bark beetles still claimed 95,000 acres of forest, DNR's report said that number is lower than it was in 2015. Douglas fir beetles claimed 51,700 acres last year, but that number has been decreasing as well.</p> <p>The western pine beetle damaged 37,800 acres in 2021, and the report said that those numbers have been steadily increasing since 2012.</p> <p>Additionally, a "possibly non-native" sooty bark disease that affects maples, horse chestnuts, Pacific dogwoods, and cherry plums has now been found in areas such as Olympia, Bellingham, and the Seattle area. More surveys are planned this summer to detect the fungus known as <i>Cryptostroma corticale</i> in other areas, as the agency notes in the report that they are unsure where else it may be.</p> <p>DNR also added that the pathogen <i>Phytophthora ramorum</i> is still being "found in streams associated with commercial plant nursery trade activity." The pathogen can potentially cause Sudden Oak Death, a forest disease that kills not only oak trees but Douglas fir and redwoods as well.</p> <p>In the news release, DNR and USFS said that forest management promotes "robust and resilient forests," and that "thinning, selective harvests, prescribed fire and removing underbrush are critical forest management tools that advance forest health — especially as the state faces increasingly hotter, drier summers."</p>
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HEADLINE	05/11 Study: air pollution impact on hurricanes
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/11/climate/air-pollution-hurricanes.html
GIST	Global warming can affect hurricanes, in part because a warmer ocean provides more energy to fuel them. But it's not the only factor in play: A study released on Wednesday confirms that, for the frequency of hurricanes, the effects of particulate air pollution are even greater.

Over the past four decades, the new research shows, the decline in pollution in the form of tiny aerosol particles from transportation, energy production and industry in North America and Europe was responsible for the increased numbers of hurricanes and other tropical cyclones in the North Atlantic.

Over the same period, increasing pollution from the growing economies of India and China had the opposite effect, reducing hurricane activity in the Western North Pacific, the study found.

A growing body of research has shown links between tropical cyclones and global warming, which is the result of human-caused emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. A [2020 study](#), for example, used observational data to show that hurricanes have become stronger and more destructive since the 1980s as the world has warmed and the oceans have absorbed more heat.

The new study looked at the numbers, not the strength, of these kinds of storms. Its author, Hiroyuki Murakami, said it shows that reducing or increasing anthropogenic aerosols “is the most important component” affecting frequency.

James P. Kossin, a scientist with The Climate Service, which analyzes climate risks for companies, and an author of the 2020 study, said that Dr. Murakami’s research was consistent with other studies showing that “warming by regional pollution reduction has a much more profound effect on hurricane activity” than warming of the ocean from increasing greenhouse gases. The new study “attempts to provide a more global context in which the regional climate changes are occurring,” he said.

The study was [published Wednesday](#) in the journal Science Advances.

Dr. Murakami, a physical scientist at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s [Geophysical Fluid Dynamics Laboratory](#) in Princeton, N.J., used computer simulations to do something that would be a practical impossibility in the real world: isolate the effects of pollutants like sulfur dioxide. These form aerosols, small particles that, as a component of air pollution, have been shown to be harmful to human health. They also can block some sunlight from reaching Earth’s surface.

In recent decades aerosol pollution has declined, [perhaps by as much as 50 percent](#), in North America and Europe as a result of laws and regulations that reduce emissions from sources like vehicles and power plants. Hurricane seasons in the North Atlantic over roughly the same period have been more active, with a greater number of storms, than in previous decades.

In the North Atlantic, Dr. Murakami found, the decline in aerosols led to warming that had two effects on tropical cyclones. First, less pollution resulted in more ocean warming, which meant there was more energy for storms to form.

The pollution decline led to warming of the land as well, and the combined warming affected atmospheric circulation, weakening winds in the upper atmosphere. That in turn led to less wind shear, the changes in wind speed and direction that can affect how cyclonic storms develop. Less wind shear meant that storms formed more readily.

Dr. Murakami’s simulations showed a different mechanism at work in the Pacific. There, he found, increasing aerosol pollution, largely from China and India, led to cooling of the land surface. This reduced the temperature difference between the land and ocean, weakening the monsoonal winds that develop there. That, in turn, led to fewer tropical cyclones, including typhoons, the Pacific equivalent of hurricanes.

Adam Sobel, a climate scientist at Columbia University, said the new study showed what other studies have shown, that in the Western North Pacific, “aerosol cooling has been compensating for greenhouse gas warming.” Just as it did in North America and Europe, that will likely change as governments in Asia move to reduce pollution because of its effects on health.

	Dr. Murakami said his work points up the difficulties that those governments will face as they move to cut pollution, since that will quite likely lead to increased number of storms.
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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	05/12 Cities back off facial recognition ban
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-cities-are-backing-off-banning-facial-recognition-crime-rises-2022-05-12/
GIST	<p>OAKLAND, Calif., May 12 (Reuters) - Facial recognition is making a comeback in the United States as bans to thwart the technology and curb racial bias in policing come under threat amid a surge in crime and increased lobbying from developers.</p> <p>Virginia in July will eliminate its prohibition on local police use of facial recognition a year after approving it, and California and the city of New Orleans as soon as this month could be next to hit the undo button.</p> <p>Homicide reports in New Orleans rose 67% over the last two years compared with the pair before, and police say they need every possible tool.</p> <p>"Technology is needed to solve these crimes and to hold individuals accountable," police Superintendent Shaun Ferguson told reporters as he called on the city council to repeal a ban that went into effect last year.</p> <p>Efforts to get bans in place are meeting resistance in jurisdictions big and small from New York and Colorado to West Lafayette, Indiana. Even Vermont, the last state left with a near-100% ban against police facial-recognition use, chipped away at its law last year to allow for investigating child sex crimes.</p> <p>From 2019 through 2021, about two dozen U.S. state or local governments passed laws restricting facial recognition. Studies had found the technology less effective in identifying Black people, and the anti-police Black Lives Matter protests gave the arguments momentum.</p> <p>But ongoing research by the federal government's National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) has shown significant industrywide progress in accuracy. And Department of Homeland Security testing published last month found little variation in accuracy across skin tone and gender.</p> <p>"There is growing interest in policy approaches that address concerns about the technology while ensuring it is used in a bounded, accurate and nondiscriminatory way that benefits communities," said Jake Parker, senior director of government relations at the lobbying group Security Industry Association.</p> <p>Shifting sentiment could bring its members, including Clearview AI, Idemia and Motorola Solutions (MSI.N), a greater share of the \$124 billion that state and local governments spend on policing annually. The portion dedicated to technology is not closely tracked.</p> <p>Gaining new police business is ever more important for Clearview, which this week settled a privacy lawsuit over images it collected from social media by agreeing not to sell its flagship system to the U.S. private sector.</p> <p>Clearview, which helps police find matches in the social media data, said it welcomes "any regulation that helps society get the most benefit from facial recognition technology while limiting potential downsides." Idemia and Motorola, which provide matches from government databases, declined to comment.</p> <p>Though the recent studies have eased lawmakers' reservations, debate is ongoing. The General Services Administration, which oversees federal contractors, said in a report released last month that major facial recognition tools disproportionately failed to match African Americans in its tests. The agency did not respond to requests to provide details about the testing.</p>

Facial recognition will be reviewed by the president's new National AI Advisory Committee, which last week began forming a subgroup tasked with studying its use in policing.

'FIRST IN NATION'

Virginia approved its ban through a process that limited input from facial recognition developers. This year, company lobbyists came prepared to advance legislation that better balanced individual liberties with police investigation needs, said State Senator Scott Surovell.

Beginning July 1, police can use facial recognition tools that achieve 98% or higher accuracy in at least one NIST test with minimal variation across demographics.

NIST declined to comment, citing practice against discussing legislation.

Tech critics said the standard is well-intentioned but imperfect and that warrants should be required for facial recognition use.

"Addressing discriminatory policing by double-checking the algorithm is a bit like trying to solve police brutality by checking the gun isn't racist: strictly speaking it's better than the alternative, but the real problem is the person holding it," said Os Keyes, an Ada Lovelace Fellow at University of Washington.

Virginia barred real-time surveillance, and face matches cannot serve as probable cause in warrant applications. Misuse can lead to a misdemeanor.

Parker, the lobbyist, called [the law](#) "the first in the nation to require the accuracy of facial recognition technology used by law enforcement to be evaluated by the U.S government" and "the nation's most stringent set of rules for its use."

Former Virginia Delegate Lashrecse Aird, who spearheaded last year's law, said companies this year wanted a model to defeat bans across the country.

"They believe this ensures greater accountability - it's progress, but I don't know," she said.

It contrasts with a [Washington state law](#) that requires agencies to conduct their own tests beforehand "in operational conditions."

'MOMENTS OF CRISIS'

California in 2019 banned police from using facial recognition on mobile devices such as body-worn cameras. But the prohibition expires on Jan. 1 because of a provision state senators added.

Now, news reports about rising retail theft and smash-and-grab robberies have captured lawmakers' attention, said Jennifer Jones, a staff attorney for ACLU of Northern California.

As a result, ACLU has faced resistance from law enforcement to make [the ban permanent](#).

"Police departments are exploiting people's fears about that crime to amass more power," Jones said. "This has been for decades, we see new technologies being pushed in moments of crisis."

Activists in New York are also pressing for a facial recognition ban despite increased crime. Eric Adams, who became mayor in January, said a month later that it could be used safely under existing rules, while his predecessor Bill de Blasio had called for more caution.

In West Lafayette, officials have twice failed to enact a ban on facial recognition over the past six months, citing its value in investigations.

	<p>“To ban it or chip away from its application would be a little short-sighted,” said Mayor John Dennis, a former police officer.</p> <p>David Sanders, the city councilor behind the ban proposals, said concern about worsening low morale among officers was "dominating people’s reactions."</p> <p>After the loss in Virginia, civil liberties groups are escalating in New Orleans. Ten national organizations last week told councilmembers to strengthen, not repeal, its ban, citing the risk of wrongful arrests based on faulty identifications.</p> <p>The local group Eye on Surveillance said New Orleans "cannot afford to go backward."</p>
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HEADLINE	05/11 Former DEA agent jailed for taking bribes
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/former-dea-agent-sentenced-to-135-months-for-taking-bribes/
GIST	<p>LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (AP) — A former Drug Enforcement Administration agent who admitted to taking thousands of dollars in bribes from a drug trafficker was sentenced Wednesday to more than 11 years in prison.</p> <p>U.S. District Judge Brian Miller sentenced Nathan Koen, who pleaded guilty last year to one count of bribery, to 135 months in prison and two years of supervised release.</p> <p>“This defendant’s actions are a disgrace to the thousands of dedicated law enforcement officers who work with integrity every day to protect and serve our communities,” U.S. Attorney Jonathan D. Ross said in a statement after the hearing.</p> <p>Federal prosecutors said that Koen, who began working for the DEA in 2002, accepted the bribes in exchange for providing sensitive information that allowed the drug trafficker to avoid detection by law enforcement and run his drug organization. The FBI in 2018 began investigating Koen, who had transferred from Jacksonville, Florida to Little Rock, Arkansas, in 2016.</p> <p>“Today’s sentencing reflects DEA’s commitment to hold accountable any DEA employee who abuses the trust of the American people by violating their oath as a federal law enforcement officer,” DEA Administrator Anne Milgram said in a statement released by prosecutors. “Nathan Koen put himself ahead of the principles he swore to protect. I commend our federal law enforcement partners who investigated this case and the U.S. Attorneys who prosecuted it.”</p> <p>The drug trafficker had paid \$31,500 to Koen before he began cooperating with the FBI, prosecutors said. Koen was arrested after prosecutors said the FBI recorded him accepting a \$9,000 bribe from the trafficker inside a Las Vegas casino.</p> <p>Blake Hendrix, an attorney for Koen, said he planned to appeal the sentence.</p> <p>Koen’s sentencing follows a number of embarrassing cases of serious misconduct in recent years that have rocked the U.S.’ premier narcotics law enforcement agency.</p> <p>Jose Irizarry, a once standout agent in Colombia and Miami, was sentenced in December to more than 12 years in federal prison after adopting the lavish lifestyle of the criminal informants he was supposed to be supervising but instead helped launder money from undercover operations. Prior to being locked away, Irizarry lashed out against his fellow agents, blaming the DEA for fostering a culture of corruption and gift taking that he said desensitized him to the implications of violating the law.</p>

Irizarry's accusations, some of which were detailed in a scathing Inspector General report, prompted the DEA's new administrator, Ann Milgram, to order an outside review of the agency's foreign operations, which is ongoing.

Another longtime agent, Chad Scott, was also sentenced last year to more than 13 years behind bars for stealing money from suspects, falsifying government records and committing perjury. A federal narcotics agent in Chicago also pleaded guilty to supplying firearms to a drug trafficker known for slaughtering his rivals, while a Colombian police captain who headed a vetted unit that works closely with the DEA was charged with selling evidence and information to key targets of U.S. investigations.

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HEADLINE	05/11 Ex-Honduras police chief detained in US
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/ex-honduras-police-chief-detained-after-us-court-appearance/
GIST	<p>NEW YORK (AP) — The former national police chief of Honduras made an initial appearance in a New York courtroom Wednesday after his extradition to the United States to face criminal drug trafficking charges, a day after the former president of the Central America country pleaded not guilty to related criminal charges.</p> <p>Juan Carlos Bonilla Valladares, 62, was detained without bail after a 10-minute proceeding before a magistrate judge in Manhattan federal court.</p> <p>A lawyer who was appointed to represent him declined comment outside court.</p> <p>Better known as “El Tigre,” or “The Tiger,” Bonilla Valladares served as the country’s top police official in 2012 and 2013. He was arrested March 9 after he was labeled by U.S. prosecutors as a co-conspirator of former President Juan Orlando Hernández and the president’s brother Tony Hernández.</p> <p>A prosecutor said he was turned over to U.S. authorities before noon on Tuesday and arrived in the New York area last night. He faces drug trafficking and weapons charges.</p> <p>“Former Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernandez would not have risen to power and successfully benefited from massive drug proceeds had it not been for his expansive network of corrupt associates,” said Anne Milgram, administrator of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration.</p> <p>“These associates, including Bonilla Valladares, likewise exploited their positions to traffic cocaine to the United States and violently protect other politically connected drug traffickers, all for their own personal gains,” she said in a release. “Bonilla Valladares further betrayed the Honduran people by using his law enforcement badge to cover for his crimes.”</p> <p>U.S. Attorney Damian Williams said the extradition of Bonilla Valladares “demonstrates that no one is exempt by virtue of their title or position of authority — even foreign Presidents and police chiefs — from criminal prosecution for contributing to the flood of illegal narcotics into this country that causes so much harm.”</p> <p>U.S. charges against Bonilla Valladares were announced in April 2020 when authorities alleged that he used his law enforcement clout to protect U.S.-bound shipments of cocaine. Bonilla denied at the time being a drug trafficker.</p> <p>He said then he would go wherever necessary to prove the accusations untrue and suggested drug traffickers were behind the accusations. He cited his long cooperation with the U.S. State Department as proof he was trusted by the U.S. government.</p>

On Tuesday, a lawyer for Honduras' former president made similar claims weeks after Hernández was extradited to New York to face charges that he received millions of dollars from 2004 to 2022 to support a drug trade that delivered hundreds of thousands of kilograms of drugs to the U.S.

Hernández, who led the Central American nation from 2014 through 2022, has denied charges including participating in a drug trafficking conspiracy, possession of machine guns and destructive devices, and conspiracy to possess machine guns and destructive devices. A trial was tentatively set for Jan. 17.

Attorney Raymond Colon said outside court Tuesday that he believed the former president was the victim of lies told by drug traffickers seeking to reduce long prison sentences. He also cited what he described as his client's long support of U.S. agencies that pursue drug traffickers and his willingness to let them be extradited to the U.S.

The former president's brother, Tony Hernández, is serving a life sentence after his October 2019 conviction in New York federal court on drug trafficking charges that prosecutors said amounted to state-sponsored drug dealing.

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HEADLINE	05/11 Seattle businesses deal w/crime, homeless
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/seattle-businesses-say-safety-training-doesnt-help-little-saigon-homeless-camp-must-go
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Frustrated small business owners say they deal with crime and people suffering from mental illness and addiction on a daily basis, and they feel like they're on their own.</p> <p>A few business owners and workers in Seattle's Little Saigon neighborhood went so far as to request special training from the police's crime prevention team. But they now fear that it's not enough.</p> <p>The growing homeless encampment on South Weller Street in Seattle now includes more than 15 tents. Businesses on the same street say they've seen a proliferation of problems, including drugs, prostitution and people having mental health episodes.</p> <p>Hello Em Viet Café and Roastery and Humble Pie are just a few of the businesses that attended a special personal safety and de-escalation training on Monday.</p> <p>According to Quynh Pham, executive director of Friends of Little Saigon, the camp on her street started growing at the beginning of the year after what happened at 12th and Jackson in the same neighborhood.</p> <p>Over the past few weeks and months, they've seen several major tent fires on their street.</p> <p>One of them did about \$20,000 in damage to Century Link power lines, according to one business owner.</p> <p>A few weeks ago, there was a shooting where as many as 20 shots were fired. A Little Saigon employee was driving home from work at the time. At the corner of S. Weller Street and Rainier Avenue South, a bullet struck her windshield. According to concerned business owners, that driver was caught in a shootout before police found the two people involved and arrested them.</p> <p>Employees, and sometimes customers, are often harassed.</p> <p>"We get harassed every day," C-Marr Automotive owner Curtis Marr said. "It's an everyday occurrence."</p> <p>He was threatened on Monday by a homeless man camping at Marr's business. Marr said he called police and they arrived four hours later.</p>

He didn't attend Monday's training but said his business and employees would be interested in future training.

Nghia Bui, co-owner of Hello Em, said two homeless campers got into a fight right in front of his business last Friday after closing time. One had a knife and one had a gun. Bui said he got video of the confrontation on cellphone.

The businesses that participated in the training say they appreciate the opportunity, but it's not enough to fix the growing homeless encampment problems on their street.

"It was s a good reminder for personal safety," Pham said. "But a lot of us kind of took away that there was not much that we could do as individuals."

"To handle a lot of issues happening in the neighborhood, I was hoping to learn something different," Bui said. "(The training) wasn't something I learned much from. It wasn't much beyond what we're doing already ourselves."

Nghia went on to say, "I wish there was more we could learn to do within the neighborhood. I feel like it put the pressure back on us."

Pham said many of the entities and businesses on South Weller Street have tried everything to resolve the homeless encampment problems. They say they've called police, tried the Find It, Fix It app, had bi-monthly meetings with officials and brought in resources outside of Seattle PD.

"We actually called on outreach, non-SPD to get resources to these folks," Quynh said. "They told us they don't have resources to do it or it's too dangerous to approach."

That's left many businesses feeling beyond frustrated.

"We want to see some type of response and we haven't heard it from the city just yet," Quynh said.

Another business owner said, "We have gone through all the proper channels of engagement and are just wasting our time. Does someone have to die before the city responds?"

Several businesses on South Weller Street say the City of Seattle isn't acting fast enough to fix what's happening South Weller Street. They say the camp has been on their street far too long now.

And they're worried that someone might be seriously injured or killed before the city takes definitive action.

KOMO News asked the mayor's office about plans for the homeless encampment on South Weller Street and we reached out to Seattle City Council to see what they are doing about it.

The mayor's office offered this statement:

"This site is on the list for resolution and is a priority for the city to address."

The statement went on to say:

"This is based on review by the Unified Care Team, which regularly meets to determine what encampments will be addressed next, considering City resource capacity and a variety of factors, including public safety incidents, shelter availability, impact to public space and the natural environment, pedestrian access, pending construction, and more.

	<p>This year, the City's HOPE Team has made 85 referrals to shelter from encampments in this general area.</p> <p>"Mayor Bruce Harrell was elected on a commitment to address the homelessness crisis with urgency and compassion. The mayor has put a renewed focus on improving the city's response by streamlining department coordination and constituent engagement, working to improve data collection and city resource deployment towards helping those living unsheltered access shelter and services and keeping sidewalks, parks and public areas clear."</p>
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HEADLINE	05/11 Chinatown-International District shooting
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/man-injured-in-chinatown-international-district-shooting
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - Seattle police are investigating a shooting that left a man injured Tuesday night.</p> <p>Before 11:30 p.m., officers responded to reports of gunfire near 4th Avenue South and South Main Street in the Chinatown-International District.</p> <p>When officers arrived, they found a firearm magazine and blood on the sidewalk.</p> <p>Shortly after, a 21-year-old man with a gunshot wound arrived with non-life-threatening injuries at a hospital in First Hill. He was later taken to Harborview Medical Center to be treated.</p> <p>Detectives with the Seattle Police Department's Gun Violence Reduction Unit are continuing the investigation.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/12 Missing 'cryptoqueen' is wanted fugitive
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/wxdmmz/ruja-ignatova-onecoin-europol
GIST	<p>A woman who allegedly made billions of pounds by conning hundreds of thousands of people from around the world in a crypto coin scam has been put on Europol's most-wanted list.</p> <p>Five years after going on the run, police have appealed for the arrest of Dr Ruja Ignatova, founder of OneCoin, a cryptocurrency that sold itself as an alternative to Bitcoin but was instead a pyramid-style scam which relieved people from 175 countries of at least £4 billion.</p> <p>The scam, one of the biggest frauds in history, which could have reaped as much as £12.7 billion from investors, was the subject of the BBC's "The Missing Cryptoqueen" podcast.</p> <p>Europol, the EU's law enforcement agency, has put up a €5,000 (around \$5,300 or £4,300) reward for information that leads to her arrest. It said Ignatova was "the driving force and intellectual inventor" of OneCoin and "is suspected of having prompted investors worldwide to invest in this worthless currency."</p> <p>So far most of Ignatova's key alleged collaborators have either been arrested or jailed, including OneCoin's co-founder Karl Sebastian Greenwood, Ignatova's brother Konstantin, her corporate lawyer Mark Scott and her lover, Gilbert Armenta.</p> <p>Journalist Jamie Bartlett has been trying to hunt down Ignatova, a 41-year-old from Bulgaria, since making the Missing Cryptoqueen podcast in 2019. She has been stripped of her Bulgarian citizenship but still has German nationality.</p> <p>Bartlett, who has a book on the case of the same name out in June, told VICE World News he was surprised it had taken so long to put Ignatova on Europol's most-wanted list.</p> <p>"She is one of the biggest criminals in the world," said Bartlett, who puts the size of her fraudulent scheme as second only to that of Bernie Madoff, architect of the largest ever Ponzi scheme in the 2000s. "White-</p>

collar crime is sometimes not seen as serious as violent crime. But this scam involved at least several billion pounds of people's money, resulting in people going bankrupt and families destroyed in every corner of the world.

"I don't understand why it took them so long to get her on the list. But I think it means they think she is still alive."

However, although Bartlett said the "net is closing on her", he described the €5,000 reward money as "derisory" due to her immense wealth and the protection she will be able to afford.

"They won't find her by offering that sort of money. The people who will have information about her whereabouts will not be tempted to risk being harmed or killed for €5,000 and I really don't think it's enough to tempt those who might be protecting her either."

He believes Ignatova will be travelling on a fake passport under a fake name with a different face, and claims the chances of her being arrested at an airport due to Europol's appeal were "extremely unlikely".

Bartlett told VICE World News that, despite huge publicity around the case over the last three years, the company originally behind the OneCoin scam is still holding events to attract investors in Latin America – where two promoters were murdered – parts of Asia and in Romania.

"It's still going. There are still people promoting it and making money," said Bartlett. "I don't think she's still making money out of the scam, but I think people are still losing money. They've been able to carry on because she's not been arrested, so they can keep it going."

Bartlett said that when Ignatova is caught, and he believes she will eventually be found, her trial will deal a powerful blow in the war against crypto scams like OneCoin.

"There are dozens of spin-off scams just like OneCoin with people selling fake crypto currency. Former promoters of OneCoin have even launched their own copycat scams. All over the world, hundreds of thousands of people are still investing every day.

"Her arrest and conviction is the one thing that might actually stop crypto scams because it would send out a powerful warning to people to be wary."

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HEADLINE	05/11 Dutch court jails 11 for 'underworld prison'
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/11/dutch-court-jails-drugs-gang-who-built-torture-room-and-cells-in-containers
GIST	<p>A Dutch court has sentenced 11 men to between one and nine years for maintaining an "underworld prison" with a torture chamber, hidden in shipping containers, in a case that shocked the Netherlands.</p> <p>The case revolved around seven containers found by police almost two years ago in a southern Dutch forest, following up on information from a hack of the European-wide EncroChat encrypted phone system, popular with criminal gangs.</p> <p>During the raid, police found one of the containers was kitted out with a dentist's chair, along with pruning shears, a saw, scalpels and pliers. The other six containers were set up to be prison cells.</p> <p>"The court found that the suspects all contributed to a plan to kidnap, ransom, blackmail, torture and kill criminal opponents or their relatives," the Amsterdam district court said in a statement on Wednesday. "The men formed a group based on a fight over money in the criminal world and planned to take the law into their own hands. The lack of respect for the personal freedom and integrity of others is shocking."</p>

Dutch media named the chief suspect as Roger P, 50, known by his underworld name “Piet Costa” – allegedly because he often travelled to Costa Rica.

Costa, who was jailed last month for 15 years for cocaine trafficking, was handed an additional 33-month sentence.

Judges jailed his 40-year-old righthand man for eight years. Nine other men were also sentenced and one was acquitted.

Dutch police discovered the prison complex after hacking the EncroChat encrypted system in 2020, and judges ruled that evidence from the system was admissible in court.

The criminals sent chat messages via EncroChat, including saying “we must have enough belts and tie-wraps to tie them” and “we need cutting pliers for fingers and toes”.

During the trial, one public prosecutor said that the evidence should remind recreational cocaine users of the consequences of their habits, a Dutch prosecutor has said.

In a hearing in February, Koos Plooi told the court that the violence of the drug trade was a “repulsive, but apparently unavoidable” result of the widespread use of illegal drugs in the Netherlands and neighbouring countries.

“The question is how many people are willing to admit that there is indeed a connection between their cocaine use – whether it is to party, deal with work stress or suppress psychological problems – and the underworld that is happy to answer demand but according to its own rules: corrupting, undermining, tough, sparing nothing and nobody,” Plooi said.

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HEADLINE	05/11 Spokane PD emphasis patrols car break-ins
SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/news/local/spokane-police-finds-success-with-emphasis-patrols-car-break-ins/293-7dafb7c2-6a1a-4f8f-b4e1-aa406801478c
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. — The Spokane Police Department (SPD) is concerned about an uptick in vehicle prowling in the downtown core. But, the downtown precinct is finding success with emphasis patrols in areas where this happens most often.</p> <p>Spokane police opened its downtown precinct at the new location next to the STA plaza about a year and half ago. At the time, Chief Craig Meidl said moving the precinct to the city’s core would help reduce crime. And so far, the data shows it’s working.</p> <p>The downtown precinct looks at criminal activity in a certain area and determines how officers can reduce that crime. Then, all the Neighborhood Resource Officers in the downtown precinct will spend some time during their workday in that designated hot spot.</p> <p>During these emphasis patrols, officers are not just using enforcement to deter crime.</p> <p>They are also working with property owners in the “Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design” program—or CPTED. It’s a free program where officers recommend changes to your property that can help prevent crime.</p> <p>“That can be from anything from landscaping to lighting cameras, where if those recommendations are implemented, we can hopefully reduce crime,” Lt. Steve Braun said.</p> <p>Braun adds that two months ago, Neighborhood Resource Officers increased their presence around Madison to Cedar and Sprague to Second Avenue. Calls for service in the area reduced from 93 in the two</p>

	<p>weeks before to 57 in the two weeks after emphasis patrols. And vehicle prowling reports went from 18 to 3.</p> <p>“That tells me that our officers are out doing a fantastic job and in the outreach in doing some of those CPTED recommendations and just being a visible presence so that the community sees our officers out in a couple of square block area as a deterrent for criminal activity,” Braun said.</p> <p>Once officers move to another identified hotspot downtown, Braun said these numbers may go back up slightly. But, they rarely go back to where they were before. He attributes this to people who implement those recommended changes to deter crime on their property.</p> <p>“If a property owner takes us up on CPTED, and they're willing to implement even some of the recommendations, we typically see a positive impact,” Braun said.</p> <p>The downtown precinct will continue to identify additional hotspots for criminal activity in the city’s core. They’ll focus their efforts in those areas for varying amounts of time.</p> <p>The hotspot officers are currently focused on the area from Division to Spokane Street and Second to Pacific.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/11 School board rejects shooting investigation
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/michigan-school-board-rejects-state-attorney-generals-2nd/story?id=84643352
GIST	<p>Oxford Community Schools rejected a second offer from the Michigan attorney general's office to investigate a school shooting in November. The school board said it will launch a third party investigation after the civil cases against the district have been litigated.</p> <p>The school board said it has been fully cooperating with the Oakland County prosecutor's investigation and will continue to do so.</p> <p>Ethan Crumbley, a former student at Oxford High School, is accused of shooting and killing four other students at the school on Nov. 30. He has pleaded not guilty and is set to stand trial in September.</p> <p>His parents, Jennifer and James Crumbley, are also facing four counts of involuntary manslaughter for allegedly failing to recognize warning signs about their son in the months before he fatally shot his classmates. Two judges have declined to reduce their bail.</p> <p>The Crumbleys have pleaded not guilty to the charges.</p> <p>A lawsuit alleges that the district failed to heed warning signs before the shooting, which the district has denied. The board said reports and analyses will be made public throughout the litigation process.</p> <p>Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel criticized the board's rejection of her office's offer.</p> <p>“I am deeply disappointed by the school board’s repeated rejection of my offers to perform an independent and thorough review of the systems and procedures in the days leading up to and on November 30, 2021,” Nessel said in a statement Wednesday.</p> <p>She said her department would only be able to perform an exhaustive and thorough review with the cooperation of the school board and district.</p> <p>"Absent that partnership, I am restricted to the publicly available information we have all read and reviewed," Nessel said.</p> <p>The school board said it will wait to launch the third-party investigation and said it will be engaging experts as part of the litigation process to thoroughly review the tragedy and the events leading up to it.</p>

	<p>"The ongoing criminal cases have understandably delayed the release of information that could be essential to our extensive review. Oxford Community Schools is also responding to numerous lawsuits at the state and federal levels which will require attention and time from our legal team, our staff and the Board," the school board said in a statement Tuesday.</p> <p>The board added, "Once the litigation process is completed and all information has risen to the surface, a team of experts will conduct a third-party review."</p> <p>The board also said it is working on a three-year recovery plan which is currently under development by the superintendent and district administration. Upon completion, the plan will be reviewed by a third-party before being implemented at the start of the 2022-2023 school year.</p> <p>Third-party group Secure Education Consultants have also completed an independent review into all district safety practices and procedures, the board said.</p> <p>Nessel claimed the board's rejection stands in the way of transparency.</p> <p>"The rejection sends a message that the board is more focused on limiting liability than responding to the loud outcry from the Oxford community to deliver greater peace of mind to the students, parents and educators that lived through this traumatic event," she said.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/11 Dallas police: 3 Korean women shot
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/dallas-police-investigating-shooting-korean-women-hair-salon/story?id=84657134
GIST	<p>Three women in Dallas were shot Wednesday afternoon after a suspect opened fire at a hair salon located in the city's Koreatown, a historically Asian district.</p> <p>The women suffered nonfatal injuries and were transported to a local hospital, according to police.</p> <p>Police told ABC News the shooting took place on the 2200 block of Royal Lane, the address of Hair World Salon.</p> <p>The shooting victims were all Korean women -- the salon owner, an employee and a customer, according to ABC News Dallas affiliate WFAA.</p> <p>Police said they learned from a witness report that an unknown Black male parked what appeared to be "a dark color minivan-type vehicle" on Royal Lane and then walked across the parking lot into the establishment and allegedly opened fire.</p> <p>"The suspect then fired multiple rounds inside the business, wounded all three victims," police said. The suspect then drove away.</p> <p>The suspect has not been identified yet, according to police, who also said the investigation is ongoing and the motive remains unknown.</p> <p>A spokesperson for the FBI field office in Dallas told ABC News on Wednesday evening that the FBI is in touch with the Dallas Police Department and is monitoring the incident.</p> <p>"Dallas Police Department is the lead investigating agency for this incident, but we are in communication with them and coordinating closely," the spokesperson said. "If, in the course of the local investigation, information comes to light of a potential federal violation, the FBI is prepared to investigate."</p> <p>While it is unclear if the shooting was targeted, the incident comes amid a spate of attacks targeting Asian Americans across the nation.</p>

	Most recently, a Chinese food delivery worker was shot in the chest in New York City last week while riding his scooter in the Forest Hills neighborhood in Queens. The motive is unclear and the investigation is ongoing in the case, according to the NYPD.
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HEADLINE	05/11 Chicago shootings: 1 dead, 10 injured
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/entertainment-music-shootings-violence-chicago-7807a77bef76f8823ae93fdaaf0eb124
GIST	<p>CHICAGO (AP) — One person was killed and 10 were injured in two shootings on Chicago’s South Side in the space of six hours, a spasm of gun violence on the hottest day of 2022 so far, serving as a warning that the city is entering the warmest and deadliest time of year.</p> <p>The victims were among 21 people who were shot in the city Tuesday.</p> <p>As of May 8, the Chicago Police Department had recorded 779 shooting incidents and 194 homicides, compared to 898 shootings and 207 homicides during the same period in 2021. Chicago and other U.S. cities reported dramatic spikes in homicide totals last year; Chicago’s 797 homicides in 2021 — its highest toll for any year in a quarter century — eclipsed Los Angeles’ tally by 400 and the total in New York by nearly 300.</p> <p>The latest gun violence in Chicago came amid a wave of mass shootings — defined by the Gun Violence Archive as shootings in which at least four people are shot — in big cities and smaller communities across the U.S.</p> <p>In the first incident Tuesday, around 4:30 p.m. in the Back of the Yards neighborhood, people who have yet to be identified climbed out of a stolen car and opened fire, police said. Five teenagers were shot, including a 19-year-old who was struck in the head and pronounced dead at a hospital soon after. His name has not been released.</p> <p>Two of the five were critically injured. A 16-year-old boy was struck four times including once in the face, and an 18-year-old man was shot in the hip and knee. Police said both are expected to survive.</p> <p>The gunmen sped off, crashed the car then fled on foot, leaving three guns behind, police said.</p> <p>Chicago Police Superintendent David Brown said investigators believe that shooting was part of an ongoing gang war that flared up last month when the brother of one gang leader was shot to death, allegedly by a rival gang member.</p> <p>Brown said officers at the scene Tuesday afternoon were attacked by gang members as they tried to administer life-saving measures to the wounded. He said two known gang members were arrested and charged with aggravated battery of a police officer.</p> <p>At about 10:30 p.m. in Jackson Park, where the Obama Presidential Center is under construction, occupants of an SUV opened fire, striking four women and two men, before speeding off. The victims were taken to hospitals and two of the women were in serious condition, police said.</p> <p>Brown said that shooting could be linked to a dispute between two groups over the disruption of a rap performance that was livestreamed on Facebook.</p> <p>No one has been arrested in either of the shootings.</p> <p>About an hour later, a man and a woman were wounded in another shooting in Jackson Park, but police couldn’t say if the two park shootings were related.</p>

	<p>Chicago's police department has been loathe to pin spikes in violent crime on warmer temperatures and the closest Brown came to suggesting the weather was a factor in Tuesday's shootings was when he said the first shooting in Jackson Park came at a time when a lot of people were in the park "enjoying the nice weather."</p> <p>But it has long been a fact in Chicago and elsewhere that as temperatures rise, so do the number of shootings. And Tuesday, after two weeks in which temperatures lingered in the 50s and 60s, the high was 89 degrees in Chicago, according to the National Weather Service. Wednesday was even hotter, at 91.</p>
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